



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 16 November 2017

Attended: Joanna Anderson (sub), Stuart Anderson, Caroline Auckland, Timothy Ball (sub), David Barnett, Adrian Berendt (Chairman), Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, Cllr Peter Bulman, Cllr Barbara Cobbold, Irene Fairbairn, Jane Fenwick, Carolyn Gray, Alex Green, Tim Harper, Cllr Lawrence Heasman, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Dean Kenward, Jackie Lloyd (sub), Linda Lewis, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Paul Mason (sub), Cllr Tracy Moore, Marguerita Morton, Altan Omer, Nick Pope, Cllr Catherine Rankin, Kate Sergeant (sub), Cllr James Scholes, David Scott, Cllr Don Sloan, Anne Stobo, Alastair Tod, David Wakefield (sub), Mary Wardrop, Denise Watts, Pat Wilson and Cllr Chris Woodward

TWBC officers present: John-Jackson Almond (Assembly Hall Theatre Director), Diane Brady (Major Projects Manager), David Candlin (Head of Economic Development and Property), Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development), Jane Fineman (Head of Finance and Procurement), Paul Taylor (Director of Change and Communities) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Mrs C Wilson

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Bill Acker, Sally Balcon, Cllr Ronen Basu, David Bushell, Cllr Ben Chapelard, John Cunningham, Brian Lippard, Charles Pope, Tim Tempest, Cllr Lynne Weatherly and Lucy Willis.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

There were none to report for this meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting dated 14 September 2017 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2017 be approved.

4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

- (a) Cinema site planning application – It was noted that representations made by the Strategic Planning Working Group relating to the redevelopment proposals for the cinema site had resulted in the Planning Committee amending one of the planning conditions and adding an ‘informative’, when they approved the application on 24 October.

5. REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

The reports of the (i) Transport, (ii) Strategic Planning, (iii) Water in the Wells and (iv) Culture, Leisure and Tourism Working Groups had been circulated with the agenda. The Chairman invited Forum members to ask questions of the respective Chairmen.

Michael Holman drew attention to the arrival once more of the town's friends from Wiesbaden, who would be offering their usual seasonal fayre at the ice rink in Calverley Grounds. It was noted that all Town Forum members were being invited to gather at the chalet at midday on Saturday 16 December, to enjoy bratwurst, glühwein and potato curls.

Katharina Mahler-Bech drew attention to the fact that there was now a planning application which had been submitted (by KCC) for the proposed Cultural and Learning Hub. Mike McGeary undertook to provide a link for members to the details of the application, from the TWBC website.

Mark Booker invited member views as to whether he should write a formal letter of support for the proposed Cultural and Learning Hub, on behalf of the Town Forum. This was agreed.

On a similar theme, Alex Green requested members to complete an on-line survey regarding Trinity Theatre's plans to provide a heritage attraction. The more responses there were, he added, would assist with the Theatre's bid for grant funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Working Group update reports were formally received and noted.

Action point 1: Mark Booker to respond on behalf of the Town Forum, setting out support for the Cultural and Learning Hub proposal.

Action point 2: Mike McGeary to provide a link to TWBC's website, providing details of the planning application which had been made for the proposed Cultural and Learning Hub.

6. TWBC'S DRAFT BUDGET 2018/19

Jane Fineman, TWBC's Head of Finance and Procurement, explained how the Borough Council would shortly be consulting on its draft budget for 2018/19. She advised that, at the current stage, the draft budget was £149k short of being balanced, but said that this was normal for this stage in the process, adding that the authority had a very good record of achieving a balanced budget by the start of the financial year.

Mrs Fineman said that the Borough Council faced the prospect of receiving no revenue support grant from central government in the coming year. One of the outcomes from this loss of funding, Mrs Fineman said, was that the district councils in Kent – along with KCC and Medway Unitary Council – had submitted a bid to be a pilot area in 2018/19, for the 100% retention of business rates. Mrs Fineman advised that the Kent authorities would find out the result of that bid in December, at the time of the local government finance settlement.

David Wakefield, Chairman of the Finance and Other Issues Working Group, said that he would convene his members, to discuss the draft budget and to prepare a suitable response. He added that he would invite Mrs Fineman to the meeting, to help the group's understanding of the key issues.

Steve Bowser asked whether the business rate pilot scheme related to just the growth in such rates. Mrs Fineman said that the Government had already provided local government with the power to retain a certain percentage of business rate growth; she added that the pilot was to judge whether 100% retention of all business rates above a specific baseline was practical and feasible.

Mr Bowser asked what the baseline would be. Mrs Fineman advised that this would be set by the Government and was not yet known.

It was agreed that any further questions on this matter would be examined by the Working Group and put to Mrs Fineman at that stage.

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

7. PROPOSED CIVIC DEVELOPMENT

David Candlin, TWBC's Head of Economic Development and Property, introduced Paddy Dillon – the architect for the civic development proposals – and Hilary Keenleyside – a leading theatre consultant also very much involved in the scheme. Mr Candlin said that the purpose of the item was to provide Town Forum members with an update on the scheme proposals, in which the following TWBC officers were also present: Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development); Paul Taylor (Director of Change and Communities); Diane Brady (Major Projects Manager); and John-Jackson Almond (Assembly Hall Theatre Director).

Mr Dillon said that there had been a high degree of engagement and discussion with interested groups and individuals affected by the proposals, which had led to a number of design changes. He provided an update on some of the key elements, including the practicalities of how vehicle movements relating to the theatre would be handled, to minimise the impact on nearby residents.

On the aspect of the new 'square' which would be created at the entrance to the scheme from Mount Pleasant Avenue, Mr Dillon said that the surface would be a mix of quality York stone and granite paving. He also provided details of some of the planting that was planned as part of the extensive landscaping surrounding the scheme. He stressed that most of the replacement trees would have full growing depth provided, with the species selected from existing types.

Ms Brady updated Forum members on the process and the timescale for the implementation of the 'masterplan' for the area and the planning application process. She also explained how the Council was proceeding with assembling the site ready for development, by means of discussions with interested parties and preparations for a compulsory purchase order, should that be necessary.

Mr Dillon highlighted some of the practical issues linked to 'construction management'. He summarised the different phases involved and the impact this would have on users of the Grounds as well as nearby residents. Mr Dillon said that there would be a significant volume of spoil which would be removed from the site, with a much smaller amount of topsoil which would be retained, for later placing on top of the underground car park. Mr Dillon advised that, to minimise the impact that the spoil removal would have on the town centre through vehicle movements, the hours of operation and the route in and out of town would be carried out under strict conditions; he said that the contractors would also be operating from a 'holding' area on the outskirts of the town, again to minimise disruption.

Members of the Forum were invited to raise issues of concern or where further detail was necessary:

Jane Fenwick asked whether the **Calverley Grounds café** would be able to continue to trade while the site hoarding was up and the development was taking place. She wondered whether the café would still have access for deliveries and removal of waste. Ms Brady advised that discussions were taking place with the tenant over the practicalities, adding that the construction management plan – which would be a

necessary part of the planning application – was key to the way in which this matter was managed.

Mrs Fenwick also asked about the plans for replacing the **public conveniences**, which would be lost as a result of the scheme. She also asked whether the wcs within the new theatre would be available for users of the Grounds. Mr Taylor said that the Council was considering a plan to bring the former bowls pavilion back into use, which might include use as public conveniences for the general public.

Denise Watts emphasised the importance of providing public conveniences for older people within the Grounds; she said such facilities were greatly valued by older people.

Mr Dillon was asked for further detail about what was planned for the **new 'square'** at the Mount Pleasant Road end of the grounds. He advised that this would essentially be a pedestrianised area, although there would also be a low level of vehicle crossover. Ms Brady added that discussions were taking place with Kent Highways over this aspect, as it was recognised that this space was an important linkage point with the town centre.

The Chairman asked what the likely timing of that phase of the development would be, and whether it was linked to the possible pedestrianisation of Mount Pleasant Road. Mr Candlin acknowledged that the space might form part of a later phase of the public realm initiative, although there was no firm timescale envisaged at this point.

Caroline Auckland sought further details about the **construction traffic** and its possible effect on existing town centre congestion and on North Farm Road, should that be the selected off-site storage area. Mr Candlin said that, until a contractor had been selected, it was not known which of the off-site options might be used or whether a contractor may have their own off-site location for use. He said that vehicle movements would only take place during restricted hours, adding that it was the first 8 weeks where the traffic flows would be at their greatest, while spoil was being removed. Mr Candlin said that, at their height, there would be approximately 72 vehicle movements per day (or 9 every hour) at this stage; to add some perspective, he added, this represented less than 3% of the daily vehicle movements when compared with all of the Council-owned car parks.

Dorothea Holman asked what the current position was in negotiations with **Hoopers**, bearing in mind their public statement regarding the threat to their business. Ms Brady emphasised that what the Borough Council was seeking were access rights over Hoopers' service yard area. She said that discussions were due to take place with Hoopers' traffic consultants the following week, adding that issues of negotiation such as this was perfectly normal in most site assembly processes.

Mrs Fenwick asked whether a comprehensive approach was being followed by the Borough Council in relation to **HGV traffic in the town centre**, covering all of the various redevelopment schemes taking place or known to occur shortly. Mr Candlin said that taking a comprehensive approach was difficult, because much of the redevelopment taking place was not under the Council's direct control. He emphasised how the authority would be able to manage the process much better under projects initiated by the Council. Mr Candlin said he would ask GVA – the lead civic development consultants – to take account of the cinema site redevelopment timetable when drawing up their construction management plan.

Nick Pope asked whether there were any plans for the Borough Council to invest in the future improvement of the rest of Calverley Grounds. Mr Taylor said the authority was willing to work with the Friends of Calverley Grounds to help prepare a longer term management plan and would investigate the funding requirement for its implementation.

Mr Pope asked whether this might be done by means of HLF grant funding, adding that when the Friends group had investigated this previously they had been told that they did not qualify. Mr Candlin advised that the difference this time might be the existence of a management plan.

Steve Bowser sought further information regarding the impact of **HGV traffic** in respect of the new theatre, including how it **accessed the site** and manoeuvred in and out of the bays provided. Mr Candlin said that there was some detail on this in the redacted copies of the Stage 3 documents. He added that, once a model had been drawn up of typical theatre programme across the year, the consultants would be able to refine that detail. He added that there would be sufficient space for up to five HGV vehicles on site, which would go off-site once they had unloaded.

Hilary Keenleyside then presented some details relating to the new theatre element of the proposals. She began by stressing that a 1200-seater theatre was an ideal size for Tunbridge Wells and provided examples of similar sized venues that operated without subsidy. She provided examples of nationally-known touring shows which the new theatre would be able to house (e.g. War Horse, Jane Eyre, Wicked etc) and provided details of typical ticket prices for these at regional theatres, compared with West End theatre charges.

Ms Keenleyside provided some background as to why ticket sales growth from the current 100,000 at the Assembly Hall Theatre to the 'break even' point of 350,000 – 400,000 (in order to reach a subsidy-free point) was a viable target.

Ms Keenleyside also spoke of the anticipated boost to the local economy that the new theatre would bring, based upon a nationally-established formula, how the transition from the current to the new theatre could best be managed, how profitable 'food and beverage' sales might be achieved and on the level of confidence over the financial projections – which showed a probable break-even position after year 6 of operation.

Michael Holman thanked Ms Keenleyside for such a positive presentation. He asked if there existed any doubts over the **viability of the new theatre**. Ms Keenleyside said she was confident that the new theatre was a viable scheme, based upon three factors: (i) the size of the potential audience; (ii) the quality of the management in place; and (iii) the fact that the town represented a large and obvious gap in the quality theatre market. Ms Keenleyside added that, if she had been asked where in the country was the best place for a new theatre, she would have readily said it should be Tunbridge Wells.

Mrs Fenwick stressed the importance of ensuring that **ticket pricing** in the new theatre was set at a realistic level and not at the point where existing – and potential – audiences were deterred from attending. Mrs Fenwick provided examples of ticket prices she had paid for two National Theatre productions: £76 and £108 for two tickets on each occasion.

Ms Keenleyside said that such a comparison was misleading, as the National was not a commercial theatre. She reiterated that, by way of example, West End ticket prices for touring shows such as War Horse would be in the region of £150 each. She added that the top choice for West End shows was almost always musicals.

Marguerita Morton referred to the £14m estimated boost to the local economy; she asked how this had been calculated. Ms Keenleyside explained that a process which had been developed by the Arts Council – known as the **Shellard Formula** – had been used to arrive at this figure. John Jackson Almond, the Assembly Hall Theatre Director, said that this same question had been raised when TWBC councillors had visited the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury. He said that, even where the Shellard Formula figure had been met with some scepticism, there was a significant amount of anecdotal evidence from

local businesses that the new Marlowe Theatre had delivered significant benefits to the local economy.

Joanna Anderson asked whether it was intended to incorporate a **studio** within the new theatre. Mrs Anderson said that she had the interests of local dance groups in mind. Mr Almond confirmed that there was no studio planned as part of the new theatre, adding that the Council had been mindful of the impact this might have had on similar facilities in the town.

Steve Bowser queried whether the Marlowe Theatre had achieved a **subsidy-free** position, based upon the City Council's financial accounts. Ms Keenleyside said that the published figures included approximately £600k - £700k of capital charges; she added that these charges should not be viewed as part of the operating costs. Ms Keenleyside advised that she had worked closely with the Marlowe and was therefore in a good position to know that they had achieved a subsidy-free position.

Linda Lewis said that her working group still had a number of specific matters of concern over the scheme. One such issue, she said, was that the **acoustics** within the new theatre would not be of the required quality for choral and symphony concerts. She asked what alternatives had been considered, including whether an acoustic 'shell' was a realistic option.

Mr Almond drew attention to the acoustic report contained within the formal documentation. From that, he advised that the new theatre would be perfectly able to house classical music. He added that the challenge would then be to find a solution that would be appropriate for the different genres, such as choral works, symphony orchestras etc. Mr Almond said that he had already held discussions with Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra members, to discuss this matter and to try and find an acceptable solution.

Ms Keenleyside said that what was being created was a lyric theatre. She advised that the best way to make progress with this issue would be to test the acoustics once the new theatre had been built and to agree a solution at that point. Ms Keenleyside added that, even though the Marlowe Theatre had an acoustic shell available for use, it was not in fact used.

Mr Colyer reported on the '**project financials**', in other words the scheme costs and how the funding of the required loan would be provided. He emphasised how the high level of engagement with interested parties had led to a number of design changes, which had had an impact on some of the scheme costs.

Mr Colyer also said that the 'public square' element of the scheme would provide the necessary *infrastructure* for a water feature to be added, although the authority was unable to fund its actual provision.

Linda Lewis asked whether an Arts Council matched-funding scheme was still available. Mr Colyer said that this related to revenue funding rather than towards capital costs and was due to end in 2019. He added it was intended that revenue fund-raising would be established, possibly by means of a charitable trust.

Lorna Blackmore asked whether the intended scheme loan of £77m would be at a fixed rate. Mr Colyer confirmed this was the case.

Steve Bowser asked if a Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) 'memorandum of agreement' was already in place. Mr Colyer advised that this was not possible in advance of the actual need, but that the Council had sought – and been given – a guarantee that a loan of this size, for this scheme, would be agreed.

Mr Colyer added that other funding options existed for the Council, not just a PWLB loan. He said that the scheme could, for example, be funded through a bank or an annuity loan, adding that it was always possible that infrastructure projects might attract a lower interest rate.

Marguerita Morton asked whether the option existed to repay the loan early or seek refinancing, without the risk of penalty. Mr Colyer said that it was likely that penalties would apply under those circumstances.

Dorothea Holman noted that the scheme timetable provided for possible **judicial reviews** to be made. She sought further details. Mr Candlin said that it was normal practice to build in a period for possible legal challenges to the process, including the **Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)** stage.

Dr Holman asked what sites within the scheme might be subject to the CPO process.

Ms Brady explained that there were many ownership interests within the area of the scheme, including freehold titles, access rights etc. She said that negotiations had been taking place for some period as part of the site assembly and it was hoped that agreement by way of 'private treaty' could be found in all – or in the significant majority of – cases. She said that she could not go into detail as the confidentiality of those interests had to be respected.

The Chairman thanked all of the presenters and the contributors to the discussion.

Action point: Tim Harper asked if the presentation on the 'project financials' could be circulated to Forum members with the minutes of the meeting.

8. PUBLIC REALM SCHEME – UPDATE

The Chairman said that he had asked for a short update to be provided, explaining what point TWBC and KCC had reached in looking at the next phase of the town centre public realm scheme.

Mike McGeary read out the following position statement, as provided by Gary Stevenson, TWBC's Head of Environment and Street Scene:

"Progress on the Public Realm Phase 2 project was reported to the last Joint Transportation Board meeting on 16 October.

The scheme's concept drawing and outline design previously presented to the Town Forum was endorsed by the Board for public consultation in the New Year (dates to be determined).

A meeting was held last week with bus operators to understand their requirements and the opportunities to reconfigure the bus shelters to enable them to be moved away from the immediate surroundings of the War Memorial."

It was noted that Mr Stevenson was willing to attend a future meeting of the Town Forum to provide a more detailed update and the latest designs.

RESOLVED – That Mr Stevenson be invited to attend the January meeting of the Town Forum and provide a more detailed update.

9. PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARY CHANGES, RECOMMENDED BY THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION

Attached to the agenda had been an extract from a consultation summary produced by the Boundary Commission for England, relating to Parliamentary constituencies. It was noted that the Commission was proposing that the Tunbridge Wells town area should become part of a new 'Tunbridge Wells and Crowborough' constituency, which would also encompass Buxted, Forest Row, Framfield, Frant, Hartfield, Maresfield, Mayfield, Rotherfield, Wadhurst and Withyham.

Jane Fenwick advised that she and David Wakefield were preparing a recommended response to the proposals as they affected Tunbridge Wells, which would be circulated to Forum members in due course.

Action point: The response to the consultation to be circulated to Forum members, who are encouraged to submit their own representations, should they wish to do so.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) **Public Spaces Protection Orders** – Dean Kenward drew attention to a formal public consultation process being conducted by TWBC which, he said, had initially included a proposal to ban dogs from being walked in some public parks, including parts of Hawkenbury Recreation Ground. He said that, after contacting TWBC's Head of Environment and Street Scene, he had been told that TWBC was not proposing to exclude dogs from Hawkenbury Recreation Ground.

Mr Kenward added that he believed that TWBC did not have a good history of prosecuting for unpaid fines as far as offences relating to dogs were concerned.

The Chairman accepted that there was likely to be a sufficient level of interest in this issue to encourage members to visit the TWBC website, view the consultation material and comment, should they wish to do so. A link to the website is given below: http://consult.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/portal/comm_safe/pspo

(b) **New Refuse and Recycling Contract** – Dean Kenward said that TWBC was looking to enhance aspects of its new waste and recycling contract, when it came up for renewal in 2019. Details of the proposal can be found from the following link (agenda item no.10 of the 'agenda reports pack'):

<http://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=118&MId=3878&Ver=4>

Mr Kenward said that the Hawkenbury Village Association believed that aspects of the proposals might have a detrimental impact on the local environment.

Katharina Mahler-Bech felt that there would be many town centre residents who would not welcome additional recycling bins being provided under the proposals, because of a lack of space.

The Chairman said he hoped that TWBC would consult with residents over these proposals.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 18 January 2018 at 6.30pm.

The meeting concluded at 9.21pm.