



Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18 March 2021, held online starting at 6pm

Members: Stuart Anderson (Beulah Road Residents' Association), Caroline Auckland (Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District), David Barnett (Friends of Grosvenor & Hilbert Parks), Jenina Bas-Pendry (Dudley Road Residents' Association), Adrian Berendt (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group), Lorna Blackmore (Grantley Court Residents' Association), Stephen Bowser (Residents' First), Mark Booker (Culverden Residents' Association), Diana Butler (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Robert Chris (Grove Hill House Residents' Association), Marieke de Jonge (Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth), John de Lucy (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery), Peter de Wit (Nevill Court Roads Committee), Heather Featherstone (Upper Stone Street Residents' Association), Ross Feeney (Royal Tunbridge Wells Together), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Residents' Association), Margaret Ginman (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery), Carolyn Gray (The Forum), Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents' Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), Delphine Houlton (Hawkenbury Village Association), Marianne MacDonald (Co-optee), Stuart MacDonald (Calverley Park Crescent Association), Katharina Mahler-Bech (Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom and Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Marguerita Morton (St John's Road Residents' Association), Sue Pound (COCA), Veronica Segall-Jones (Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum), Don Sloan (Molyneux Park Gardens Residents' Association), Dawn Stanford (Nourish Community Foodbank), Angus Stewart (Tunbridge Wells Anti-Aircraft Noise Group), Anne Stobo (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Museum, Library and Art Gallery), Tim Tempest (Friends of The Grove), Alastair Tod (Poona Road Residents' Association), Adrian Thorne (Ramslye Residents) and Carol Wilson (Inner London Road Residents' Association).

Borough Councillors: Councillors Atwood (Park ward), Ellis (St. John's ward), Lidstone (St. John's ward), Morton (St. John's ward), Pound (Sherwood ward), Rutland (Culverden ward), Scott (Culverden ward) and Woodward (Broadwater ward).

Others in Attendance: Councillor Bailey (Portfolio Holder for Sustainability TWBC), William Benson (Chief Executive TWBC), Mark Brown, Karin Grey (Sustainability Manager TWBC), Jane Lang (Housing Manager TWBC), Councillor Mackonochie (Portfolio Holder for Communities and Wellbeing TWBC), Angela McPherson, Councillor Podbury (Rusthall ward), Noreen O'Meara, Jasmine Whiteside and Mark O'Callaghan (Secretary to the Town Forum).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1 The following apologies were received:
 - Brian Lippard (Civic Society of Royal Tunbridge Wells)
 - Valerie Le Moignan (Friends of Hawkenbury Recreation Ground)
 - Matt Brown (Tunbridge Wells Puppetry Festival)

DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

- 2 The following substitutes were representing their respective member organisations:
 - Stuart MacDonald (Calverley Park Crescent Association)
 - Veronica Segall-Jones (Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum)
 - Angus Stewart (Tunbridge Wells Anti-Aircraft Noise Group)

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

3 a) Changes to Membership

The following changes in membership were noted:

- None.

b) New Membership Applications

New membership applications had been accepted from:

- None.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 19 NOVEMBER 2020

4 No amendments were proposed. The minutes were noted.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 28 JANUARY 2021

5 No amendments were proposed. The minutes were noted.

UPDATES FROM MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

6 Boyne Park Residents' Association

Dorothea Holman reported on feedback gathered by residents regarding regeneration, paper not yet published but summarised. Issues include:

- Feeling that council had limited ability to take action due to budget and lack of power.
- Members of the public needed to participate more in local matters.
- Could the other towns provide an example for Tunbridge Wells? Dundee changed High Street making it a destination.
- High traffic reduced High Street use and increases likelihood of shop closures. Tunbridge Wells had a lot of vacant shops.
- Cinema site mentioned, it was expected the council take action on this.
- Ideas to make Tunbridge Wells a hub included: sharing of funding and initiatives between council and residents; allowing funding and events in the town; initiatives to support smaller businesses; increase in greenery; and improvements to parking and public transport.
- There were a lot of independent events but greater promotion and large events centrally would encourage tourism.

Tunbridge Wells Anti-Aircraft Noise Group (T.W.A.A.N.G.)

Angus Stewart provided an update which included the following points:

- In the 4th quarter of 2020 there was an 86% reduction in flights. January saw only 6% flight frequency of previous year.
- Due to financial troubles during the pandemic, Gatwick planned to expand aggressively in two ways. First, by using main runway which would be difficult to challenge. Second, from conversion of the standby runway (45% of expansion would come from standby runway expansion) and this required a Development Consent Order which could be challenged. French company Vinci SA had agreed to fund the expansion.
- Positively Gatwick was continuing to support the Noise Management Board which involved working groups. T.W.A.A.N.G. was involved in this as one of its community groups.

- Noise metrics were used to influence future plans. Metrics used by Gatwick were much higher than those recommended by the World Health Organisation and the areas monitored did not cover the Tunbridge Wells area; only monitoring as far as Edenbridge despite a high volume of complaints coming from the Tunbridge Wells area.
- The flight path during landing moves up to 10 nautical miles in variation at night which forces the aircraft over the town. Gatwick proposed to run reduced night-noise trials to investigate use of precise navigation methods and reduce low-flying outflyers which produced the most noise at night. Night flying was the biggest issue and the government was proposing to keep regulations the same as they have been since 2006.
- There was an ongoing consultation on future issues which would determine the restructure of the airspace in the South East. In future it was planned that aircraft would use Performance Based Navigation which would result in concentrated areas of air traffic and it would be imperative that communities such as Tunbridge Wells fight their case to avoid having one of these areas over the town.
- There was a problem with representation. Despite being invited, the Borough Council had not appointed a representative to speak on the town's behalf at the forum (other councils had done so, including Tonbridge and Malling and Wealden). Greg Clarke had raised the issue with the Borough Council. All councillors had been contacted but none had responded.
- TWBC Chief Executive had asked the Leader for nominations but this may be postponed until after elections. In the meantime, if any councillors could offer their time they would be encouraged to do so.
- T.W.A.A.N.G. needed also to strengthen their committee with additional members who could offer new skills and expertise and further details could be found on the website.
- It was recommended for T.W.A.A.N.G. to reach out to Rusthall Parish Council who were also severely affected. Councillor Podbury from Speldhurst Parish Council and Rusthall ward, who was also member of the Aircraft Committee, stated that Rusthall were always included in their feedback and kept involved.

CAR CLUB

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Karin Grey, Sustainability Manager TWBC, presented:

- Publicly accessible car club launched in September 2014. There were initially two cars available at Mount Pleasant Road near the train station and one by the Town Hall and in May 2015 an additional third car was introduced (a fully electric Nissan Leaf), which was located at Crescent Rd multistorey car park. Membership increased further and by December 2015 a further three cars were added although due to it's unpopular location, the car located at Crescent Road car park was shelved.
- Currently the locations of car club vehicles are at:
 - The Tunbridge Wells train station,
 - Civic Way,
 - Mount Ephraim,
 - Grove Hill Road,
 - Camden Road surface car park.
- Process for booking was to choose a slot, use vehicle and return to original location.

- Other schemes not currently running involved privately-owned cars being hired out and car share systems.
- The cars used were smaller petrol, hybrid and electric vehicles which contribute to reduced emissions compared to other privately-used cars. Other benefits included reduced costs to individuals (by avoiding outright car ownership), reduced parking demand, reduced congestion and reduction in CO2.
- It was estimated that each car club car reduced individual car ownership by approximately 6 private cars (usually in multi car households).
- There had been a reduction in use during the pandemic but the rate was increasing again. Due to their popularity there was a plan for expansion in collaboration with Co-Wheels and the parking and highways teams. The car club were looking to add further cars and areas being looked at as potential new locations include St Johns, High Street, The Pantiles, Little Mount Sion, Warwick Park and Eridge Rd (ideally with electric vehicles but this was dependent on electric chargers being introduced).
- The process of adding additional cars took approximately six months. It was usually desirable to add the additional car at the end of an existing controlled parking bay area by removing the yellow lines and extending the parking area. Locations to site new vehicles would usually be in an area of high parking congestion as this helps ease the parking congestion. It was not desirable to add the bays to multistorey car parks as the areas needed to be easily accessible, well-lit and accessible 24 hours per day. There was a smart system for unlocking the cars.
- Community car clubs were useful for social inclusion and projects were being looked at with this in mind.
- Joining required an individual to provide license details and pay a membership fee of £25. Hires were in 15 minute increments up to a full day of use and paid by mileage. Hirers must be a minimum 21 years been driving for at least one year.
- Car club users are also more likely to use public transport when not using the vehicles due to the reduction in private ownership and use. The reduction in private ownership is of specific importance as this reduced parking demand in the town.
- Due to covid-19 restrictions there had to be a blocking out of use after hire and additional cleaning.

REPORTS FROM THE TOWN FORUM WORKING GROUPS

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Transport

Jane Fenwick presented:

- Survey had been undertaken on unregistered pathways and there had been a number of volunteers from the Town Forum who had come forward.
- In January and February more than 60 alleyways were identified. 35 additional rights of way have been checked for access and signage.
- A report on the survey and findings would be done next month. It would need to be identified why these alleyways haven't previously been registered. These public rights of way were of great importance for the town.
- Commons and parkland had not been included as it was public land already.

- To have pathways registered and mapped would help members of the public's ease of movement and access.

Strategic Planning

Mark Booker presented:

- Stephen Baughen (Head of Planning) is to make a presentation at a special briefing on Monday 12 April at 6pm to go through the Local Plan and consultation with the Town Forum.
- Details of the consultation were still awaited which was due to open at the end of this April.
- Changes to the Draft Local Plan included specific policies on use of brown field sites and reduction of CO2 emissions. There was a removal of the Calverley Square policy and other additions on providing employment growth at the business park and other sites and a Town Centre Action Plan which addressed unfinished developments, improvements to transport and reductions to congestion in specific areas. More details to follow at the presentation.

Water in the Wells

Michael Holman presented:

- The inscription on the water feature in the Pantiles had now been corrected. The water was still overflowing onto the pavement which would need to be attended to by Dandara.
- The report showed that there was a very dilapidated fountain in Dunorlan Park – the oldest in the town – where it had been found to be almost inaccessible and required approximately £20-£30k spending on it. It was required to have a civil engineer to assess it to ascertain what needed to be done to preserve it to avoid it falling down and being removed entirely.

BENCHES

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Caroline Auckland, Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District, presented:

- Soroptimist Tunbridge Wells presented survey findings on bench usage in the town. It was noted they had a specific importance for social inclusion especially after the pandemic eases, being beneficial for mental health.
- There had been a 20% reduction in bench numbers. Issues emerged involving views from benches, maintenance and overgrown vegetation and issues regarding identifying responsibility for maintenance of the benches.
- Examples of issues include:
 - A bench opposite the commons on London Road – the view was of the traffic and air quality would be poor due to congestion;
 - A badly damaged bench on Inner London Road;
 - Overgrown vegetation at the bench on the Garden Road/Lansdowne Road junction;
 - Two benches on Mount Pleasant which had well-used bins nearby which required more regular emptying; and
 - A bench adjacent to the zebra crossing on the A26 which was in the vicinity of idling traffic and a relocation back towards Thackery's was recommended.

- Challenges include:
 - ascertaining who was responsible for maintenance;
 - encouraging the local community; and
 - businesses to identify new sites and for new developments to include bench sites in their designs.
- Other creative designs which varied from the heritage type commonly used in the borough may be appropriate for different areas of the town. Project ideas could include a school project to design a bench made of sustainable materials.
- It needed to be identified whether there was a public bench inventory and what the process was of maintaining and reporting issues and any funding issues. Could sponsorship from local businesses be used to aid maintenance.
- KCC had recently set up crowd funding sites and potentially chat benches could be looked at as a new project.
- The locations of current benches needed to be looked at and their design and use is of importance.
- It was noted that a large number were falling apart and if they were maintained better this issue could be avoided. Action was required on this as soon as possible with a suggestion of beginning a working group as an ongoing measure to manage them.
- Ross Feeney (Royal Tunbridge Wells Together) was happy to look into sponsorship and funding.
- It was clarified that although benches had been removed from Royal Victoria Place this was a temporary Covid-19 measure and these would be reinstated.
- Tunbridge Wells Men's Shed advises they are already involved in repairs within the community and going forward state they are happy to contribute to the maintenance of benches.

REOPENING THE TOWN CENTRE

- 10 William Benson, Chief Executive TWBC, presented:
- Not making signage and security a priority as people understood restrictions.
 - Feedback showed there was an appetite to get back to restaurants, bars and shops, with emphasis to be on safety and welcome back.
 - Cleaning and bin emptying was a priority.
 - Potential to use Market Square on Camden Road to cater for outdoor eating.
 - Outdoor events were not an immediate a priority but longer term would be looking at TW Works.
 - Members were asked to consider how Tunbridge Wells could be improved post Covid-19. It was suggested that future brain storming sessions could take place in collaboration with Boyne Park Residents Association with respect to the reopening.

UPDATE FROM THE BOROUGH COUNCIL

- 11 William Benson, Chief Executive TWBC, presented – Economic recovery:
- Need to manage expectations of the Council – income was down £8 million this year on net revenue budget of £13 million. With all promised support, the net deficit was estimated to be £1.5 million this year, £1.9 million for 2022 and £3 million in 2023. This would be funded from reserves.

- This was projected but may change if people start returning to town centre and spending more. As a result reserves are essentially all allocated.
- Various grants had been announced but none of them appear to be going to Tunbridge Wells as it was deemed to be of a lower priority than other boroughs in Kent.

Other Council business:

- A Community Ownership fund of around £250,000 may be able to be utilised whereby a site is selected for protection as a community asset. The cinema site is probably not suitable.
- Some delays in the Amelia Scott project but should not impact on opening date.
- There were delays at the Household Waste and Recycling Centre (the tip) as it had been oversubscribed with users from the Sevenoaks site following a fire, but this would be resolved soon.
- People were encouraged to sign up for the Council's e-bulletin which gave local news items; meetings and planning applications. Local residents should be encouraged to subscribe to this. There are 2,500 subscribers currently.
- Elections were going ahead with some challenges laying ahead.
- Crowdfunding Kent – KCC was making a significant amount of money available with match-funding of up to £25,000 which could be used for various projects and wasn't subject to any criteria involving need or deprivation.
- The Assembly Hall had a programme for local creative learning with details available online.
- The Five Year Plan will probably be revisited later in this year.

HOMELESSNESS AND CRESCENT ROAD PROPERTIES

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Jane Lang, Housing Services Manager TWBC, presented:

- In 2020, 1287 people applied for help regarding homelessness, with around a third being families with children and the remainder being single people and couples without children. Around half this number reached out in January. Causes included: breakdown of relationships; end of tenancy; domestic abuse and unsuitable accommodation.
- Aim was to get to people as soon as possible to prevent them becoming homeless in the first place, trying to resolve issues within the family or resolve issues with the landlord. The next stage was a rent deposit scheme to help people rent privately and have their deposit.
- There were safety nets such as emergency accommodation as no social housing was readily available.
- The key priority was ending rough sleeping, which had been so for several years.
- Funding had helped provide a dedicated outreach worker to get people off the streets as soon as possible and there was also a navigator to assist them with attending appointments.
- There was also additional funding and support to assist those already in social housing so they did not lose their tenancies, as well as additional funding for emergency housing and rent deposits.
- Housing First provided emergency accommodation with additional support. Individuals did not have to meet set criteria such as being drug and alcohol free but support was provided in this regard. There were 11 Housing First properties, some leased by Town and Country

Housing and some purchased for us by local company Children's Salon and these were furnished so tenants have everything they need.

- Last year saw the Everyone In initiative in which the government encouraged all rough sleepers to be brought off the streets. 135 single people who would not have normally be assessed as needing emergency accommodation have been provided accommodation.
- The Council owned properties on Crescent Road and funding had been applied for from the government to renovate three empty houses into six one bedroom flats. These would be provided as accommodation owned and managed by the Council in conjunction with Look Ahead who also run Colebrook Road Hostel. It was hoped these properties would be ready to move into by the end of June. There would be an office on site part-time with support and a roaming concierge service to check on the properties at night, which was carried out in other areas successfully.
- It is suggested that the properties would be particularly suitable for single people and there was little car parking but it was hoped to be temporary accommodation and for people to move on to more permanent accommodation in time.
- Additional funding has been raised to reduce CO2 emissions on the Crescent Road properties making everything as energy efficient as possible within the properties.
- Further support was expected to be available from the government after Covid-19 as a continuation of this support to avoid people being back on the streets. Finance needed to be applied for every year so it was always uncertain as to whether the funds would definitely be available for the following year for these projects The government were usually very supportive of this kind of work so it was expected to continue post pandemic.
- There was an issue with individuals who did not want to cooperate but with perseverance this was usually resolved. There had been a much more holistic approach during lockdown to work with people to identify what problems they have and tackle issues with individuals before homelessness arises this and has been one of the positive outcomes during the pandemic.

RECORDING MEETINGS

- 13 Meetings were currently recorded for note taking purposes. Members' views were sought on making the recordings available: a) publicly; or b) to members. Members were encouraged to give their thoughts to Mark regarding this for future meetings.

ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS OR TOPICS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

14 Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth

- Hustings to be held on 12 and 15 April at 7.30pm where candidates could introduce themselves and discuss their vision of climate action in whole wider area and open up discussion with public.
- Local Plan Briefing on 12 April would be at 6pm to avoid a clash.

FUTURE MEETINGS

15 12 April 2021 (Local Plan briefing)
 17 June 2021
 16 September 2021
 11 November 2021 (AGM)

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Report of the Transport Working Group to the Town Forum on Thursday 17th June 2021

Members: Jane Fenwick (Chair), Adrian Berendt, Carol Wilson, Lorna Blackmore, Tom van den Bergh, Katharina Mahler Bech, Cllr David Scott, Cllr Peter Lidstone, Ian Rennardson, Sally Balcon.

The next meeting of the TWG is to be on Monday 21 June at 7pm. Matters arising since the last meeting in February..

1. **Local Plan:** Members of the TWG have contributed to the Town Form's consultation response to the Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan. The consultants report on the LCWIP scheme was published as a supporting document to the Local Plan and some TWG members attended a 'Zoom' meeting with TWBC's Hilary Smith who explained its proposals in April.
2. **The Alleyways, Twittens and Paths Survey** of the urban area of central Tunbridge Wells undertaken by members of the Town Forum was completed and submitted to TWBC for consideration and action. More than 70 alleyways were found that had not been registered as Public Rights of Way. These pathways which link communities and provide traffic free short cuts around the town need to be secured for the future and integrated into the future active travel system. We are pleased to report that TWBCs Hilary Smith (Economic Development) and Stephen Baughen (Planning) have welcomed our report. The alleyways and paths we identified are being put onto the TWBC's GIS system which will help to determine land ownership and be helpful information to the LCWIP and Town Centre Area Plan SPD (see below) which are being developed. We hope to work cooperatively with the Council to improve the legal status of these alleyways to protect them for the future.
3. **School bus parking on London Road:** The TWG has raised concerns that the 'bus stand' on London Road beside the Commons is filled by school buses on school days. The TWG and local residents feel that some of the bus operators are misusing the bus stand as a 'free' bus depot, occupying all the places all day leaving none for tourist bus operators. This is damaging to the town's value as a visitor destination as this mass of mostly bright yellow buses blocks views of the historic Commons and rock outcrops. We understand that some research into suitable alternative locations for parking these buses is being undertaken and we hope a solution will be found in time for the autumn term.
4. **Town Centre Area Plan:** TWBC has announced that it will be working to produce a Town Centre Area Plan as an SPD (Supplementary Planning Document) to the Local Plan to cover the particular needs of the urban area of Tunbridge Wells. In June 2017, The TWG published "Towards Change", an analysis of the transport issues in Tunbridge Wells then. Three years later in 2020 we republished it as the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgency of implementing some of its suggestions. The TWG will be updating this document again as its contributing to the transport/travel element of this proposed SPD.
5. **Renaming 'Union House' car park:** TWG members and the Town Forum's management group were requested to suggest an appropriate name for this car park near the new '1887' development to reflects its location close to the historic Pantiles. The simple name of 'The Pantiles Car Park' was decided on. The restored car park will have 112 spaces for public use and although initially it won't have EV chargers in it, the electricity supply is being laid for them. An EV supplier is currently being sought.

Agenda Item 6

Brief Town Forum Working Group Culture, Leisure and Tourism news.
May 2021

FULL TOWN FORUM

1. Follow up on Soroptimists presentation at March Full Town Forum meeting, on benches:

In response to William Benson's request following the Town Forum presentation Soroptimists have forwarded reports and presentations along with discussion points relating to maintenance and sponsorship.

They have also had a positive meeting with Gemma Stapeley of Tunbridge Wells & Rusthall Commons Conservators to discuss the benches in those areas.

TOWN NEWS

2. 2021 Puppetry Festival (15th -17th October) has set up a Spacehive page, for donations and supportive comments:

<https://www.spacehive.com/tunbridge-wells-puppetry-festival-2021>

3. 2021 TW Fringe Festival (5 - 18th July) across the town:

<https://twfringe.com/>

WORKING GROUP MEETING APRIL 2021:

4. We had an interesting presentation from RTWCS Chair, Paul Avis, about Heritage Open Days (10th -19th September, across the borough).

<http://tunbridgewellsheritageopendays.org/>

5. The meeting also had a short presentation on RTW IN Bloom:

<http://www.royaltunbridgewellsinbloom.org.uk/>

To note, Open Days 13th June 2021 - up to date info also on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/RoyalTunbridgeWellsinBloom>

Agenda Item 6

6. We were concerned to hear from Michael Holman (Water in the Wells) about the state of the Dunorlan Park fountain (Grade II listed). We understand TWBC parks department are looking into how to repair a leaking section.