

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Thursday, 18 July 2019

Members: Stuart Anderson (Beulah Road Residents Association), Sally Balcon (Friends of the Commons), Tim Ball (Calverley Park Crescent Association), Lindsay Barker (Boyne Park Residents Association), David Barnett (Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Parks), Adrian Berendt (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group), Mark Booker (Culverden Residents Association), Stephen Bowser (Residents First), John Cunningham (Warwick Park Residents Association), Irene Fairburn (TWAANG), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Residents Association), Margaret Ginman (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery), Carolyn Gray (The Forum), Delphine Hamilton (Hawkenbury Village Association), Tim Harper (Camden Park Residents Association), Marieke de Jonge (Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth), Kyrios Kyriacou (Kingswood Residents Association), Mark Levenstein (Molineux Park Residents Association), Linda Lewis (Tunbridge Wells Puppetry Festival), Brian Lippard (Civic Society of RTW), Marianne Mac Donald (Nourish Community Foodbank), Paul Mason (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group), Angela McPherson (Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District), Altar Omer (Benhall Mill Road Association), Don Sloan (Molineux Park Residents Association), David Wakefield (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), Jason Wood.

Borough Councillors: Councillors Andrew Hickey (Pantiles & St Mark's ward), David Scott (Culverden ward).

Others in Attendance: Councillor Jane March (Deputy Leader, TWBC), Hilary Smith (Economic Development Manager, TWBC) Finbar Gibbons (Head of Policy and Governance, TWBC), Mark O'Callaghan (Scrutiny and Engagement Officer, TWBC, and Secretary to the Town Forum).

APOLOGIES

- 1 Apologies were received from Denise Watts (Tunbridge Wells Over Fifties Forum).

DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

- 2 Angela McPherson was substituting for Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District. Delphine Hamilton was substituting for Hawkenbury Village Association.

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

- 3 New membership applications had been accepted from Molineux Park Residents Association and Dudley Road Residents Association.

UPDATE FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

- 4 Councillor Jane March, deputising for the Leader, and Councillor David Scott gave an update and answered questions on the following subjects.

Royal Victoria Place:

- British Land announced that they confirmed their plans to turn Ely Court into a food and entertainment market, including restaurants, bars and a pop-up cinema. Work will start immediately with the aim to open later this summer.

- This comes on top of British Land's earlier announcement for a £11m refurbishment of the centre. Together with Elysian's plans to start work on the cinema site at the end of the year, plus all the other developments in and around RTW show that developers and investors have confidence in the long term future of RTW.
- Ely Court was unlikely to need planning permission as the works used the existing footprint.
- What has been announced is only for a refurbishment but there is an expectation for wider plans to create more of a destination retail space (consistent with their approach to other sites elsewhere) but the refurbishment and Ely Court plans enable British Land to get on and make progress on something quickly.
- A change of use may require permission but at this time the detail is unknown.
- Relevant licensing applications had been received and accepted. A notice had been up at the entrance to Ely Court for 6-8 weeks confirming license application for change of use, sale of alcohol, restaurants and live music up to 11 – 12pm.

Climate Emergency:

- At the Full Council meeting on 17 July 2019 a joint motion on Climate Emergency was agreed. It wasn't quite unanimous, with one abstention. The body of the Council agreed that we are in a climate emergency and we are signing up along with over 100 councils throughout the country. A cross party task force will be set up to invite experts tell us what we can be doing as a council and how we can encourage residents to be climate responsible. We have also signed up to be carbon neutral by 2030. It also is to include residents and young people in a citizens assembly to provide ideas and to involve of young people in their future.
- A cross party initiative was welcomed and the citizens assembly is a fantastic idea.
- The climate emergency motion is very important and it isn't just for councils to solve, we are all a part of the problem and a part of the solution and so it's for every individual to take responsibility.

Calverley Square:

- Councillor Scott added that the second encouraging vote was with regards to Calverley Square, there's a great deal of information out there, some misleading but there is a now a framework for considering the alternatives and options in a rational manner, ensuring people can make decisions in a timely manner, especially given time or delays can cost money. Getting collaboration across the board via a unanimous vote means that discussions can be constructive and the Town Forum is an important part of supporting the process to get things moving forward.
- Calverley Square refers to the project to deliver a theatre, offices, civic space, parking and improved public realm. The council would only occupy 1/3 of the area of the offices being paid for by rental income on the remaining 2/3.
- A report will be coming soon with regards to different uses for these buildings and any implications in terms of running costs, capital costs and asset values.
- The total asset value for RTW would be in the region of £210m with the maximum loan being looked at of £77m so a large difference that provides value for the future.

- There will be no further expenditure to the Calverley Square project until the report comes in so decisions can freely be made on the choices available.
- Calverley Square had cost approximately £11m so far with very little expenditure left to come at this stage.
- Considerations for alternative uses for the site had happened prior to 2 years ago when the decision to proceed with the program was made.

Amelia Scott:

- The Amelia Scott cultural centre seemed to have been a little forgotten in the midst of the Calverley Square focus and that the Cultural Leisure and Tourism working group were concerned over changed being made that nobody knew about.
- The various tenders are now back having been delayed for a couple of weeks, there needs to be a process of value engineering to look at each of the services to see what cuts can be made to bring the figures back in line with what was expected, meaning the fundraising requirement is realistic.
- There will be a project board meeting with KCC and each of the services that go into the Amelia Scott in the next 2 weeks with the new figures to determine what changes can and can't be made within the budget and what is the most cost effective means of construction and contractors.
- The exact costs won't be known until all the tenders and figures are gone through. The trustees will be meeting next week to set up a trust and start the fundraising.

Action: The Town Forum requested that an exact figure on the costs to date of the Calverley Square project be provided by the Council.

LOCAL CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE PLANS

- 5 Hilary Smith (Economic Development Manager, TWBC) explained that LCWIPs were introduced through the Government's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy which was published in 2017. Intended to provide a longer term approach to local walking and cycling networks, they cover a period of around 10 years. The Government is prescriptive over the key output of these documents, firstly is a network plan for walking and cycling, secondly a prioritised programme of infrastructure improvements and finally a report which sets out the analysis that underlies the network and the narrative that supports this. Several LCWIPs have been published, notably Warrington, Broxbourne and Ashford.

The LCWIP has a specific process that needs to be followed, the DfT requires evidence of the use of a number of specific assessment tools and a prioritisation exercise which isn't quite so prescriptive that will look at things like the network conditions, costs or political and community support. Without an LCWIP government funding is more difficult to bid for, although no funding is guaranteed. This strategy document does help with other funding such as S106 funding.

With the help of the Town Forum, 16 walking route audits and 5 cycling corridors have been identified. The types of improvement measures are tightening of bell mouth junctions, 20 mph, replacement of broken paving or filtered permeability schemes where roads are closed to vehicles only.

Success requires innovative designs and political and community support. Work to date has been done in house and so we are in the process of commissioning further work to look at areas of the town not yet covered as well as urban routes.

It was confirmed that the Air Quality Action Plan and the LCWIP were working closely and linked. Walking routes would be looked at that both avoided cars and followed main routes to suit individual journey needs. Air Quality is an assessment factor when scoring routes and networks.

The initiative was welcomed but there were concerns over any recommended routes which are not consistent with good air quality, we have to shape a society where people are more conscious of their environment. It was confirmed that the LCWIP is more about getting more people to walk and cycle, there won't be specific recommendations around paths to take over other options.

It was asked whether the Town Forum can get sight of the current LCWIP routes and whether the Pembury Hospital area is in the current plans, the response was that this will be explored and that the initial focus has been on routes into the town.

It was important that it's not just about cycle routes or lanes but also simply low traffic residential streets.

The LCWIP remit went beyond provision and towards actually promoting and encouraging active use, it will be linked with a number of initiatives and will likely promote the LCWIP once it's finalised. There were many examples nationally and internationally where if you build the infrastructure then people will use it. So it's more about enablement than encouragement.

Everyone should be vigilant with regards to protecting and preserving public rights of way. A project called The Lost Ways of Kent will investigate those which need to be reinstated.

20MPH ZONES

- 6 The Chairman explained that in May KCC changed its policy on the use of 20mph Zones/Limits. Previously, support for a scheme was based on reaching a threshold of deaths or it had to be a deprived ward. Now, if a scheme is community led and funded then KCC will support it. Secondly, to create a 20mph Zone, if the average speed on a road was 24mph or higher legislation requires that physical calming must be introduced, physical measures are not required to introduce a 20mph speed limit so it represents a cheaper alternative. One of the questions is whether to just roll out across the whole town with some major routes exempt. The police are still consulted when new/revised Limits/Zones are proposed.

It was reported that The Banner Farm 20 mph initiative has been approved with general approval of the way the scheme was implemented.

There followed a discussion as to what evidence was available to show the effective of 20mph Zones and it was confirmed that average speeds were lower in areas where Zones had been introduced.

The issue of enforcement was raised, particularly at Speldhurst School, where a 20mph Limit/Zone exists but where speeds were higher. Enforcement methods were compared between Somerset and Kent stating that in Somerset speed checks had increased resulting in a 50% reduction in killed and seriously injured. It was also noted that speed reduction also had a direct link to the issues surrounding climate change.

Consideration was given as to whether there should be a vote on the introduction of 20mph Limits/Zones across the town. It was agreed that the issue should be discussed further and with a wider audience before taking it to a vote.

CALVERLEY SQUARE

- 7 This had been discussed within the Update from the Leader of the Council (item 4).

CLIMATE EMERGENCY

- 8 In addition to the update already given, the question was asked as to the timescale for setting up the Task Force. It was hoped that it would be taken forward in the next couple of weeks as ideally the Forum would like to extend an invitation to the CEO of Stroud to come and discuss their approach and progress. Included in this discussion would be details of how such an assembly would work.

BENCHES - REPORT ON STATUS OF BENCHES IN ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS

- 9 A report has been commissioned to assess the condition of the benches around the town. A report produced in 2010 on the unparished areas was used as a baseline for the analysis.

The main results of the study showed that 21% of the benches have now gone due to replacement and maintenance not being carried out. This raised the issue of who was responsible for the maintenance of the benches and whether damaged benches should be replaced (and what materials should be used). Other issues being considered include how and where benches are used, looking into the possibility at benches that are audio enabled (to provide information), and going forward, how to record where benches are located (Google Maps?). A full report is available from the Chairman and will be circulated.

REPORTS FROM THE TOWN FORUM WORKING GROUPS

- 10 There was an issue of access to the bath and the spring at Fonthill. It was reported that meetings had taken place with the Conservator and a Landscape Architect and work was ongoing to make it more of an attraction.

UPDATES FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS' GROUPS

- 11 Warwick Park Area Residents Association – A comprehensive update on the parking situation. It was agreed that an update would be provided.
- Sherborne Close Management Committee – A question was raised regarding the provision within the town for low income, older people in terms of

development. It was agreed that the Council would provide a response.

Friends of The Grove – The issue relating to the quality of the work carried out by Sodexo who have dug up plants planted by local residents. A similar issue has also been raised by the Friends of Dunorlan so it was suggested both groups work together on this issue. In addition, there was an issue where a lorry reversed into a traditional lamp standard which has yet to be replaced.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 12 Local Plan Draft – The Local Draft Plan would be published on 26 July 2019. On 5 September there will be an open presentation and discussion between officers from planning policy and any members of the Town Forum who wish to attend. Time to be confirmed.

Roundabouts – KCC and TWBC have agreed to design 6 roundabouts, the contract for these is currently with Marketing Force with the aim of getting everything ready by 10 April 2020. It was suggested that Tunbridge Wells in Bloom, Water in the Wells and The Town Forum are involved in the process.

Gatwick Airport – Changes in runway uses at the airport with a knock on effect of more aircrafts over the area. Linked to this, the concern of an additional runway at Gatwick should the airport expansion at Heathrow not go ahead. It was agreed that the Town Forum should make their concerns clear on this matter and that something will be drafted on this issue.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 8.30pm.