



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 19 May 2016

Attended: Bob Atwood, Caroline Auckland (sub), Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Adrian Berendt, Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, Cllr Ben Chapelard, John Cunningham, Jane Fenwick, Alex Green, Cllr Lawrence Heasman, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Bill Kern, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Kyrios Kyriacou, Cllr Peter Lidstone, Cllr Tracy Moore, Chris Morris, Marguerita Morton, Altan Omer, Tim Tempest, Alastair Tod (Chairman), David Wakefield (sub), Mary Wardrop, Denise Watts, Philip Whitbourn (sub), Pat Wilson and Cllr Chris Woodward

TWBC officers present: Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance), Kevin Hetherington (Head of Communities and Wellbeing), Gary Stevenson (Head of Environment and Street Scene) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Cllr Alan McDermott (Deputy Leader and Portfolio-holder for Planning and Transportation) and David Scott

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Bill Acker (sub), Cllr Ronen Basu, Cllr Peter Bulman, David Bushell, Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold, Adrian Cory, Sue Kaner, Brian Lippard, Cllr David Neve, Angela Phillips (sub), Charles Pope, Cllr Catherine Rankin, Cllr James Scholes, Cllr Don Sloan, Anne Stobo and Cllr Lynne Weatherly.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary reported that Adrian Cory was standing down from the chairmanship of the Number One Community Trust and would no longer be attending Town Forum meetings. He would be replaced by Janet Phythian.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting dated 24 March 2016 were submitted for approval.

Cllr Tracy Moore asked if her name could be added to the list of those who had given their apologies for absence, having notified the Forum's Administrator in advance of the meeting.

RESOLVED – That, with that amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2016 be approved.

4. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman made the following announcements:

(a) Town Forum website – Mr Tod acknowledged the considerable amount of work which Katharina Mahler-Bech had undertaken in recent years in maintaining the Town Forum's website. He added that the Forum's Management Committee had considered

how best to enhance the Forum's profile more generally and had concluded that establishing a Facebook page would be more advantageous. Mr Tod advised that Alex Green had offered to take a lead in setting this up. In terms of the action point agreed at the last meeting – of listing the working groups and their membership – the Chairman said that this would form a part of the Facebook data available. He added that people wishing to learn more information would be advised to contact Mike McGeary.

Mr Tod advised that the Facebook page would also provide: (i) details of the Forum's Constitution; (ii) information about the Forum's aims; (iii) an opportunity for the different working groups to post regular updates on their work; and (iv) a link to various reports of general interest which the Town Forum had produced.

(b) Amendments to the Constitution – The Chairman advised that the Forum's Management Committee had examined the current Constitution and would be setting out a number of proposed amendments for the membership to consider at the Annual General Meeting to be held on 23 November. Mr Tod added that the proposed changes were mainly minor and technical in nature but, overall, reflected how the Town Forum operated in practice.

(c) Chairmanship of the Tourism and Leisure Working Group – The Chairman advised that Dorothea Holman was standing down from the chairmanship of this working group. He expressed his gratitude and thanks to Mrs Holman for her work over a number of years, adding that the group would still function and meet, as and when necessary.

(d) Civic complex – The Chairman advised that TWBC had conducted a stakeholder event for interested parties, where the Council's appointed consultants – Allies and Morrison – had outlined the proposals for new offices and a replacement theatre and had invited guests to share their views. Mr Tod felt that the consultants' presentation had been well-conducted, adding that the majority view expressed was that the proposals were viewed as a positive opportunity for wide community benefit.

5. ACTIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

24 March 2016

3 Working group membership

(This is covered under minute 4(a) above.)

9(d) The Grove – lighting

Mike McGeary advised that Gary Stevenson, the relevant Head of Service, had acknowledged that there had been a number of faulty lights in the Grove but had advised that all of the reported defects had now been put right.

9(e) Taxis

Mike McGeary advised that the same Head of Service had responded to the various points raised at the last meeting as follows: (i) TWBC had a policy in place which set out a maximum number of hackney carriages that could be licensed; (ii) the policy was kept under regular review and was informed by an independent survey of hackney carriage services; (iii) at the time of the last review, TWBC's Licensing Committee had agreed to maintain the policy to limit the number of licensed hackney carriages and not to increase that total;

(iv) the next survey of services was due later this year; and (v) if there were particular concerns about a licensed driver's conduct, these could be investigated by TWBC's licensing officers.

6. UPDATE REPORT FROM TWBC'S CABINET

Cllr Alan McDermott, TWBC's Deputy Leader and Portfolio-holder for Planning and Transportation, reported that the Leader of the Council had sent his apologies for this meeting. Cllr McDermott provided the following update on issues of general interest:

- (a) **The civic complex** – adding to what the Chairman reported under minute 4(d) above, Cllr McDermott advised that further engagement work would start soon on TWBC's proposals for new offices and a replacement theatre; he stressed that the Town Forum was recognised as a key consultation group in this respect.
- (b) **Cinema site** – Cllr McDermott reiterated that this site had now been sold to the privately-owned real estate company Altitude who, he added, had been one of the bidders who had actively engaged with the Borough Council at the time when the site was first marketed. He added that senior councillors and officers were pressing the developer to ensure completion of the necessary 'due diligence' and to come forward with a workable scheme in line with the Council's requirements for the site.
- (c) **Public realm** – Cllr McDermott advised that TWBC had been successful in its bid for support from the West Kent Local Sustainable Transport Fund (a part of the Government's 'Local Growth Fund') in respect of the next phase of the public realm scheme in Mount Pleasant Road. The sum secured was £1m, he added, which represented approximately 75% of the estimated scheme costs. Cllr McDermott said that these proposals would be taken into account by the architects for the Cultural and Learning Hub and the 'masterplan' for the future of the existing Town Hall site.

Michael Holman referred to the 'snagging' works for phase I of this scheme, which were still to be carried out. He asked when these works would, in the Council's opinion, be finished, especially around the Millennium Clock area. Cllr McDermott advised that a timetable for the works was still being discussed with KCC, which would attempt to minimise the level of disruption. Gary Stevenson, TWBC's Head of Environment and Street Scene, acknowledged that there had been issues with the quality of workmanship in some areas and that there were snagging items to complete. He added that the high level of overrunning of the tactile paving had created a need to increase the specification of the sub-base. He added that it would be the second contractor used on the scheme who would be undertaking the works to complete the scheme.

Marguerita Morton sought confirmation that the remedial work was being carried out at the contractor's expense. Cllr McDermott confirmed that the Borough Council would not be required to pay for the work to rectify the quality of workmanship issues and snagging items.

- (d) **Cultural and Learning Hub** – Cllr McDermott reported that TWBC was preparing to tender for specialist consultants to progress the funding bid through the next stage of the Heritage Lottery Fund process. He added that a lead architect and an interpretational designer would be recruited shortly, leading towards a stage 2 bid which needed to be submitted in July 2017.

Dorothea Holman asked how the cultural and learning hub and the next phase of the public realm scheme could be delivered in harmony, in order to provide the

maximum benefit. Cllr McDermott felt that the best solution would be for the two schemes to be implemented simultaneously but, if that were not possible, then the Council was ensuring that details of each scheme were being carefully co-ordinated by the Property Service. He added that the Borough Council was keen to re-locate the bus stops adjacent to the war memorial, to provide a more appropriate setting for commemoration services.

Gary Stevenson, the Head of Environment and Street Scene, added that Alan Legg, TWBC's Urban Planner, was closely involved in both schemes and would provide the necessary co-ordination. He added that the architect's brief for the cultural and learning hub scheme, which was due to be issued within the next three weeks, would contain an instruction for full collaborative working with the public realm team.

David Wakefield thanked the Deputy Leader for the update report provided. He welcomed the planned re-location of the bus stops away from the war memorial, adding that the presence of buses with engines running at, for instance, the Armistice Day memorial ceremony was a constant problem.

- (e) **'Love where we live' awards** – Cllr McDermott encouraged Town Forum members to submit nominations for these annual awards. He read through the various categories, adding that the deadline for nominations was 29 July. Further details can be found from the following link:

<http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/residents/news/website-news-articles/2016/april/love-where-we-live-awards-2016>

- (f) **Site Allocations Development Plan Document** – Cllr McDermott said that the authority was expecting to receive the Government inspector's final report on this issue within the following 10 days. He added that the timetable for the formal adoption of the document had still to be determined.

7. PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS TO THE TOWN CENTRE – PHASE 2

Mark Booker, the Chairman of the Planning and Development Working Group, summarised his discussion paper which had been circulated with the agenda. The purpose of the paper, he advised, was to draw together a number of different strands related to the next phase of the public realm improvements in the town centre, covering: traffic management; forthcoming changes to the nature – and use – of neighbouring buildings in Mount Pleasant; the palette of materials to be used; and the execution and project management of this next phase.

Mr Booker drew attention to the criticism of some of the materials which had been used for phase 1 of the scheme, from which it was possible to set out a number of recommendations for the next stage. These were listed in the discussion paper and included: maximum use of the traditional materials prevalent in other parts of the historic centre and a greater emphasis on quality even if this may reduce the area that can be treated in the short term, etc.

Jane Fenwick endorsed the need to take a comprehensive approach to the town centre improvements, covering the range of elements set out in the paper. She also stressed the importance in the design of phase 2 and any further stages of encouraging walking and cycling. Mrs Fenwick felt that the public realm initiative should be based upon achieving a fully pedestrianised area, not one that provided a shared space. She added that it should be a prime objective to reduce the amount of

traffic in the town centre but also to be aware of the consequent impact on 'feeder' routes, such as Crescent and Lansdowne Roads.

Dorothea Holman expressed her support for Mr Booker's discussion paper, which she felt should be viewed as the first part of the Town Forum's formal response to the proposed phase 2 work.

Mrs Fenwick raised a number of other, related issues:

- (i) the stationing of white vans on the pedestrian precinct related to a recent shop-fitting, which had a significant impact on pedestrian flow. Mrs Fenwick felt there should be a proper process of regulating this activity;
- (ii) (ii) with planning permission having been given for a major enhancement scheme for RVP, Mrs Fenwick asked how construction traffic would be managed for such a large-scale scheme. She urged that nearby residential streets should be protected from excessive parking by contractor vehicles;
- (iii) (iii) the restaurant CAU in Mount Pleasant Road had set out a large area of enclosed, outdoor seating for diners, which was drawing a significant number of complaints as it was using two-thirds of the paving.

Mr Stevenson responded to the points made:

- (i) he advised that there were no formal parking restrictions in place on the pedestrian precinct but added that he would investigate whether some control mechanism might be appropriate;
- (ii) (ii) when the detailed plans are submitted for the RVP expansion, the Council would look very carefully at the construction traffic aspect and determine whether parking restrictions in nearby residential streets might be appropriate;
- (iii) (iii) he was aware of the level of disquiet over CAU's external seating area, adding that the company had subsequently submitted a planning application to regularise the position. Mr Stevenson acknowledged that an excessive area was being used and he added that he would provide contact details for people to lodge a formal objection through the planning process, if they wished to.

Mr Stevenson also responded to the quality issues raised in respect of phase 2 of the public realm scheme. He advised that the Leader of the Council was examining the option of appointing a 'clerk of works' type role, in order to ensure full compliance with the agreed specification. He added that phase 2 of the scheme would not prohibit vehicular traffic. He advised that this was an aspect of the 'sustainability' test of the scheme.

Mr Stevenson added that he had previously met with Mr Booker to talk through aspects of the public realm scheme and that he would be agreeable to further discussions on the points raised in his paper, in order to look at the detailed points set out.

Cllr Ben Chapelard felt that the phase 2 public realm plans were premature, due to:

- (i) no decisions having yet been made on the cinema site;
- (ii) (ii) the uncertainty of the impact of the cultural and learning hub on Mount Pleasant Road; and

- (iii) (iii) if £1m were being made available for 'sustainable transport' in the town was this the best way of spending such a sum. He felt there was a strong case for learning the lessons from phase I first, before any consideration was given to subsequent phases. Cllr McDermott advised that the £1m from the West Kent Local Sustainable Transport Fund had been granted for this scheme alone and not for any other use.

Dr Philip Whitbourn expressed his dismay at the inclusion of railings in phase I of the public realm scheme; he felt that they served no useful purpose. Mr Stevenson explained that the railings had not been part of the original scheme design but that, when the pelican crossing safety audit had been carried out, one of its conclusions was that pedestrian protection was required at the adjacent crossing junction. Mr Stevenson added that it was hoped that, with less vehicular traffic resulting from completion of phase 2 of the scheme, it would be possible to remove these railings.

John Cunningham welcomed the general move towards the 'café culture' feel of many parts of the town centre. He felt, however, that it was not only CAU that was taking liberties; he believed the same applied to some parts of the Pantiles. He therefore asked if it were possible for regular inspections to be conducted by the Borough Council, to see if café and restaurant owners are operating within specified limits. It was noted, however, that the Pantiles was owned by Targetfollow, thus the Borough Council had no power to act under the circumstances described.

Alex Green said that a Section 106 agreement was in place in respect of highway improvements in Camden Road; he asked if the same contractor employed for the Fiveways' works could also be used for the potential work that may take place on Camden Road from the associated planned section 106 contribution from the RVP development, to help ensure consistency. Mr Stevenson advised that RVP would be employing their own chosen contractors for the scheme, so the Borough Council had no control over this element. However, he added that Alan Legg would be involved in the scheme details and would be able to provide some consistency of approach.

Stephen Bowser felt that the bus shelters aspect of phase I of the public realm scheme had not resulted in improvements to the visual landscape. Mr Booker felt that there was no ideal solution but that it was important to relocate the shelters away from the war memorial; he believed that the shelters on the opposite side of Mount Pleasant Road could probably remain.

Mr Stevenson added that the Borough Council had already started to look at the possible rationalisation of bus shelters as part of phase 2 but added that it was not the intention that they should all be moved to the area outside the Metro Bank. He also responded to the comments made about the signage installed under phase I. He reiterated that all of the signs were compliant with the relevant legal requirements. With the implementation of phase 2, he added, it might be possible to rationalise the number of highway signs.

In concluding the debate, the Chairman asked for views on whether the discussion paper circulated with the agenda should be formally adopted as the Town Forum's initial response to the phase 2 public realm proposals. Katharina Mahler-Bech supported this suggestion, provided that it did not include the relocation of all bus shelters to the area outside the Metro Bank. It was confirmed that there was no such reference within the discussion paper.

RESOLVED – That the discussion paper produced by the Chairman of the Planning and Development Working Group be agreed as the Town Forum's initial response to TWBC's proposals for phase 2 of the public realm scheme.

8. TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH SPORTS AND ACTIVE RECREATION STRATEGY 2016-21

Kevin Hetherington, TWBC's Head of Communities and Wellbeing, began by providing an update on the Borough Council's proposals for a cultural and learning hub, based on the Museum, Library and Adult Education Centre buildings. He advised that there were two distinct work streams being worked on, with the timetable being dictated by the various funding bodies.

The first of these was the construction element with an open tendering process to be started shortly, through the required OJEU (Open Journal of the European Union) contract route. He added that the delivery panel which the Council had established would also be appointing an architect for the scheme in October, followed by a full public consultation process in February 2017 and a planning application expected to be made in July 2017.

The other work stream, Mr Hetherington advised, was the 'people and services' element of the project, with its focus on exactly what functions would be taking place within the hub.

Dorothea Holman sought confirmation that it was the Council's intention to transfer the Gateway and the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) to the hub. Mr Hetherington advised that this was the intention, adding that the provision of these services had been an important aspect of the funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. He explained that the inclusion of these services would help to attract a 'different demographic' to the traditional museum environment, which was seen as a clear benefit. Mr Hetherington added that, over the course of the next three to four years, there was a clear expectation that a different Gateway 'model' would be expected, with its base more aligned to an interactive and self-service process.

Bob Atwood reiterated his concerns about the proposal to incorporate both the Gateway and the TIC service within the hub building. He explained his unease about the mix of services that would result and was not convinced that the 'different demographic' argument was sufficiently robust.

Mr Hetherington suggested that it might be helpful for Mr Atwood to speak to the managers of both the Library and the Museum, to hear at first hand their support for the concept. Mrs Holman advised that she had viewed at first hand tourist information placed within a gallery and museum reception, which was well used by the public.

Mr Hetherington next turned to the Tunbridge Wells Borough Sports and Active Recreation Strategy, which had just completed a period of formal public consultation. He explained how the focus was not just on sports but also on healthy lifestyles, including encouraging more people to walk and cycle.

Mr Hetherington advised that, following representations from Mark Booker, the document had been amended to take account of the key findings of the Town Forum's Green Network study from last year. He added that the document was being submitted to the Cabinet on 22 June, where it was hoped it would be formally adopted.

Sally Balcon drew attention to the condition of some of the Council-owned sports pitches and urged that more be done to make the surfaces playable, especially those that suffered from poor drainage, such as in Grosvenor and Hilbert Park. Mr Hetherington advised that the Strategy did not focus on individual playing fields or sports pitches but contained much more of a focus on the benefits of sports and activity.

On the specific issue raised by Mrs Balcon, Gary Stevenson acknowledged that the lower football pitch in Grosvenor and Hilbert Park was adjacent to a number of active springs, which on occasions had an adverse impact on the quality of the playing surface.

Mark Booker welcomed the publication of the Strategy and its reference to, and recommendations of, the Town Forum's Green Network study. He felt that there should be less of a distinction between 'walking' and 'sport', adding that combining the health benefit of both was a key element.

Jane Fenwick asked if there were any specific funds available to help deliver the main aspects of the Strategy. Mr Hetherington advised that there were no specific capital funds earmarked at this stage but that a small revenue budget existed in the form of grants, which were intended to encourage sports development, for example the popular 'park runs'.

The Chairman thanked both Mr Hetherington and Mr Stevenson for the report and for responding to the points raised.

There were no specific action points arising from this report.

9. AIRCRAFT NOISE

Further to the presentation provided by TWAANG for Town Forum members at the January meeting, Gary Stevenson, TWBC's Head of Environment and Street Scene, gave an update report. He advised that his Principal Environmental Health Officer, John McCullough, had undertaken a thorough review of the 'Independent Arrivals Review Team' report. He added that Gatwick Airport Limited, the operators, had agreed to all of the recommended actions in the report and were now consulting on their proposed response. Mr Stevenson advised that many of the 'Arrivals Review' report's recommendations were quite easy to implement.

Cllr Lawrence Heasman provided a summary of the current position, particularly the importance of the establishment of a Noise Monitoring Board. He stressed the need to ensure that the residents of the town had an effective channel through which to voice their concerns about noise levels, adding that he was pressing for better representation on the Monitoring Board.

Marguerita Morton sought further information about the restrictions on night flights. Cllr Heasman advised that a certain number of flights were allowed, partly because some were caused through delayed departures from overseas. He added that, under such circumstances, the Gatwick operators did have the power to impose heavy fines on the relevant airline companies but that this was rarely enforced.

Jane Fenwick read out the key issues from a briefing note provided by TWAANG, which had been provided for her Transport Strategy Working Group. The main focus of the update was on the representation of the proposed Noise Management Board. Mrs Fenwick warned that there seemed to be a strong likelihood that there would be little or no possibility for the direct input of the views of Tunbridge Wells residents into the work of the Board.

Mrs Fenwick advised that the relevant community groups were being asked to agree a proposal on representation, in time for the first meeting of the Board which was due to take place on 21 June.

Cllr Heasman voiced his support for TWAANG being one of the representative groups, adding that they were well-regarded amongst their peers.

Cllr Heasman and Gary Stevenson were thanked for their update report. There were no specific action points arising from this item.

10. TWBC'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION

Jane Clarke, TWBC's Head of Policy and Governance, explained the Borough Council's overview and scrutiny function. She invited Town Forum members to propose topics or issues which might be suitable for detailed study for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee through their councillor-led 'task and finish group' work.

Cllr Chris Woodward provided some examples of studies which had been undertaken in the recent past, but added that the task and finish groups established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee only had limited resources at their disposal for research and administrative support.

Stephen Bowser asked whether it might be appropriate to suggest that compliance with the national transparency code be examined, particularly with respect to parking data. Ms Clarke advised that compliance with the code was a mandatory requirement, adding that, specifically relating to parking data, there was already some information available on the authority's website. She said that more detailed data was being added (in addition to the mandatory requirement), with a more accessible route being provided shortly, to make this an easier process.

Lorna Blackmore asked whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was politically-balanced, in accordance with the relevant legislation. Ms Clarke confirmed that this was the case.

Dorothea Holman proposed that the Town Forum agree on a maximum of three topics which could be put forward for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny's work programme.

Jane Fenwick asked if one of those proposals could be an examination of transport functions in the Borough as a co-ordinated approach. She felt that this was an important element in relevant project planning which was currently missing. Michael Holman supported this proposal, adding that it was an aspect which had been raised earlier – under minute 7, the public realm item – where the Borough Council was being urged to take account of a number of linked issues in its consideration of the next phase.

Ms Clarke noted this proposal and added that the Committee and its task and finish groups had the option of co-opting non-voting people with relevant expertise to assist councillors in their work.

Bob Atwood very much supported this proposal. He said that this principle was a central feature of the former Town Centre Area Action Plan, adding that he had regretted the Borough Council's decision to replace this initiative.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to include within their work programme a study of the importance of taking a co-ordinated approach in project planning, such as has been illustrated in the next phase of the public realm scheme set out under minute 7 of this meeting.

11. TWINNING

Michael Holman provided an update on recent developments in the Borough's formal twinning link with Wiesbaden. He explained how his interest in promoting the potential of the 'water heritage' of Tunbridge Wells had been largely inspired by the example of

Wiesbaden, where their spa heritage was ‘magnificently and profitably exploited for the benefits of residents and tourists alike’.

Mr Holman advised that he had recently handed over the chairmanship of the Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association – a position he had enjoyed for the past 12 years – to Cllr Julian Stanyer. He added that Cllr Stanyer and the current Tunbridge Wells Mayor, Cllr David Elliott, had both visited Wiesbaden at the launch of ‘The Year of Twin Towns’ initiative, which the German city had declared in recognition of the designation of two of Wiesbaden’s other twin towns – San Sebastian and Wroclaw – as European Capitals of Culture. The important aspect, Mr Holman stressed, was that the twin town network had the potential to provide significant benefit to Tunbridge Wells in the promotion of international relations on a communal level.

The full text of Mr Holman’s report is attached for members’ information at Appendix A.

There were no specific action points arising from this report.

12. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Tourism and Leisure – Dorothea Holman, Chairman of this working group, advised that she had been maintaining contact with those leading on the ‘Tunbridge Wells Together’ town centre initiative, adding that, as soon as a manager had been appointed, the working group would be looking to work closely with them.

Mrs Holman added that a report on the recent questionnaire survey would be made shortly by Nick Pope, who had been leading on this work. She also advised that Mike Westphal had been informed of TWBC’s Cycling Strategy including the leisure cycling path from Penshurst to Tunbridge Wells, adding that he had been provided with information about the West Kent Partnership, to which he could apply for funding for the project, if needed.

Mrs Holman advised that she was stepping down from the chairmanship of this working group but that its work would continue.

Transport Strategy – Jane Fenwick, Acting Chairman of this working group, referred to her written report, which had been distributed with the agenda. This had covered a wide range of key topics, including: KCC’s dropping of the Crescent Road refuge proposal and Cllr Bulman’s subsequent representations; traffic volumes and speed along Calverley Park Gardens; a number of cycling-related initiatives; progress with the ‘self-guided vehicles trial’; the preparation of an outline transport strategy/vision for the town; a list of the ‘top 10’ potholes for action; Gatwick aircraft noise; and the co-option of David Scott as a member of the working group.

Planning and Development Strategy – Mark Booker, Chairman of this working group, reported on the following issues:

(i) Union House – Dandara had completed consultation on their revised scheme details and a response was awaited;

(ii) Arriva bus depot – Mr Booker advised that this site was likely to come forward soon, with a probable ‘extra care’ housing scheme being proposed. He added that legal opinion was that this type of housing provision would count towards the Borough’s overall housing target;

(iii) Mr Booker had recently met with TWBC's Head of Planning Services and the Planning Policy Manager, from which he had been concerned to learn how central government policy over-ruled local planning policy. He added that the most recent evidence in support of that position was in respect of planning appeal decisions at both Hawkhurst and Sissinghurst.

Mr Booker explained how, under the existing Local Plan, 75% of new dwellings in the Borough would have to be provided in Tunbridge Wells town and Southborough. He added that, based upon a recent central government ruling, both 'green belt' and 'AONB' land might be at risk because of the significance of the recently-introduced 'housing needs assessment'. Interestingly, Mr Booker advised, the creation of new 'garden towns' provided some mitigation against the imposition of increased housing targets.

Cllr Lawrence Heasman, who was a member of TWBC's Planning Committee, acknowledged the pressure which local government faced in terms of planning inspectors imposing government policy over local plans; he added that work was underway to resolve this situation as quickly as possible.

The Chairman asked that this topic should feature as one of the key items for the next meeting.

Water in the Wells Working Group – Michael Holman, Chairman of this working group, provided an update report. He advised that the group continued to encourage, to monitor and to 'chivvy', both developers and the Borough Council, to win support for the role that water could play. He focused on four key projects, details of which are set out in the attached Appendix B. Specific attention was drawn to Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, where the restoration programme was almost complete. He expressed concern that, unless there was an effective maintenance contract and regime in place, the water pumps could fail and the build-up of debris become increasingly unsightly. He advised that members of the working group would continue their monitoring of the situation and seek an assurance from TWBC Parks Service regarding a proper level of maintenance for the pumps and lake.

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that there were no specific issues to report on.

Culture – Bob Atwood, Chairman of this working group, advised that there were no specific issues to report on.

RESOLVED – That the progress reports be accepted.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Roundabouts – The poor condition and appearance of some high profile roundabouts was highlighted, with a suggestion that some of the local garden centres could be encouraged to provide and maintain plants. The Chairman advised that KCC did not favour access to roundabouts because of the health and safety aspect of work being carried out.

Michael Holman responded by suggesting that, if TWBC were eventually to assume responsibility for highways, it would provide an opportunity for the installation, for instance, of dry water features, which would greatly improve the appearance of roundabouts, with no maintenance implications.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 21 July 2016 at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 8.25pm.

APPENDIX A**TWINNING**

1. For more than a quarter of a century the Borough has had a formal twinning charter with Wiesbaden – our only twin town. (Wiesbaden has more than a dozen!) The link, however, goes back more than half a century. In the last fifteen years it has been sustained, promoted and developed almost entirely by the Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association of which I was Chairman between 2004 and the end of April this year and which I have represented on the Forum.
2. Of late my voice in the Town Forum has been raised largely to promote the water, health and wealth heritage of Tunbridge Wells as an inspiration for the town's future development. My interest in promoting the potential of this heritage, however, has been largely inspired by the example of Wiesbaden. As anyone who has visited the town will know, in Wiesbaden the spa heritage is magnificently and profitably exploited for the benefit of residents and tourists alike.
3. From 1 May this year Cllr. Julian Stanyer has taken over from me as Chairman of TWTFa. I am delighted to be able to pass the twinning baton to Julian. He was Mayor 2014-15 and enthusiastically supported our 25th anniversary celebrations.
4. The number of Wiesbaden's twin towns clearly demonstrates the importance it attaches to twinning in the promotion of international relations on a communal level.
5. This year two of Wiesbaden's twin towns, Wroclaw in Poland and San Sebastian in Northern Spain, are European Capitals of Culture. To mark this honour the Lord Mayor of Wiesbaden declared 2016 'The Year of Twin Towns'. In April he invited Mayors and Chairmen of Twinning Associations in all Wiesbaden's twin towns to a grand launch. Our Mayor, David Elliott, and Julian Stanyer both attended this launch and came back hugely impressed by the cordiality of their welcome, official and unofficial. They were also impressed by the twin town network of which Tunbridge Wells is part and which could be exploited for mutual benefit. (I am sure they would be happy to tell you about their impressions.)
6. Twinning is clearly alive and well in Wiesbaden, and I am confident that Julian and his TWTFa Committee will keep it alive and well in Tunbridge Wells too.
7. Although I have now stood down as Chairman of TWTFa, I have been asked to continue as TWTFa representative on the Town Forum. I will do this with pleasure and will continue to promote Wiesbaden, water, health and wealth as an inspiration for Royal Tunbridge Wells.

(Michael Holman, 19 May 2016)

APPENDIX B**WATER IN THE WELLS WORKING GROUP**

Progress report for Town Forum Meeting 19 May 2016

Over the past two months the Working Group has continued its monitoring, encouraging and chivvying operation, both with developers and TWBC, seeking to win support for the role water might play in promoting the town's future health, wealth, leisure and pleasure.

I will concentrate on four key projects: one still hanging fire at the conceptual stage; one soon to be started; one nearing completion, and finally, one almost completed, but needing a little further monitoring to ensure that money spent has been well spent.

1. Fiveways: still hanging fire until we are given to understand that refurbishment phase one - the area round the Millennium Clock – has been well and truly finished. Until this part of the project has finally been signed off by KCC and TWBC, we are not keen for Water in the Wells to be too publicly associated with it.
2. Knights Wood: construction start imminent. The new school shell is in place and the open space a little further in to the right lies ready for a local firm to begin work for Dandara. Completion is still planned before the start of new school year in September.
3. Royal Wells Park: nearing completion. One can now see from Mount Ephraim where the feature will run. We are attempting to discover when the opening ceremony will be held. It is essential for a management company to conclude maintenance agreement. Three Wiesbaden cycle stands are on order. Elegant and practical, they will serve to establish a visual link to parts of the town's public realm where the stands are already in place.
4. Grosvenor and Hilbert Park: almost completed. For the 2 May launch, water was being pumped through the Victorian Dripping Wells and flowing strongly, generating sound and spectacle, putting the modest trickle of the Pantiles Chalybeate Spring in the posh part of town to shame! Marnock Lake is full - most of the time – but debris is building up, now at one end of the lake, now at the other, depending on the wind direction. We are seeking assurance from the Parks Department not only that regular inspection and removal will be carried out, but also that a maintenance contract be signed to ensure that the pumps continue to push the water through. If this is not done, the lake will very soon silt up and become an eyesore rather than an attraction. The Town Forum recognises that water features need regular maintenance, and the Working Group will continue to be vigilant, monitoring progress and making sure that the Heritage Lottery money has been well spent. At the launch on 2 May, work on the Wetlands again appeared to have been halted. Visitors to the park were, however, able to enjoy in the extensive excavated area lower down the valley a fine view of the largest expanse of chalybeate water in the town.

(Michael Holman, 19 May 2016)