



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 20 March 2014

Attended: Cllr Bob Backhouse, Sally Balcon, Lindsay Barker (sub), Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, June Bridgeman, Cllr Peter Bulman, Adrian Cory, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Jane Fenwick, Alex Green, Michaela van Halewyn, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, George Lawson (sub), Katharina Mahler-Bech, Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew, Helen Mitcham (sub), Chris Morris, Altan Omer, Angela Phillips, Cllr Trevor Poile, Cllr David Scott, Alastair Tod, David Wakefield (Chairman), Mary Wardrop, Philip Whitbourn (sub) and Cllr Chris Woodward

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Democratic and Community Engagement Manager) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Léonie Harrington and Cllr David Jukes (Leader of the Council)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: David Barnett, Sue Kaner, John Forster, Anne Stobo and Cllrs Ben Chapelard, Caroline Derrick, David Neve, Len Price, Lynne Weatherly and Frank Williams.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary, TWBC's Democratic Services Officer, reported that the Management Committee of the Town Forum had approved an application from the Culverden Residents' Association to become members; their representative, Mark Booker, was welcomed to his first meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2014 were presented.

The Chairman drew attention to a number of actions where he asked for a verbal update to be given, as follows:

Minute 7 – Re-painting of railway bridges, Mount Pleasant Road. Adam Chalmers, TWBC's Democratic and Community Engagement Manager, advised that Network Rail would shortly be inviting tenders for this work, with expectation that the work would be carried out in the late-spring period.

Minute 9 – 'Sounds of the Wells'. Adam Chalmers advised that Cllr Derrick was leading on the provision of a co-ordinated press pack relating to this initiative; he added that Cllr Derrick would welcome any further information on the specific events planned as soon as possible.

Minute 10 – South East Water customer metering programme. The Chairman, David Wakefield, advised that he had attended this briefing, along with a number of other Town Forum members. He added that he had found the event to be very informative and interesting.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2014 be agreed.

4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

16 January 2014

4 Evidence of formal appointment to the Town Forum

MMcG Representatives to submit evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum.

Mike McGeary, TWBC Democratic Services Officer, advised that the position remained that 21 out of the 35 active representative organisations had now submitted evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum. The Chairman reiterated once more the importance of submitting this information, in the interests of good governance.

5. UPDATE REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, INCLUDING TWBC'S DRAFT 'VISION'

Cllr David Jukes, Leader of the Council, advised that the responses received so far on **TWBC's draft 'Vision'** had been positive. He reminded the Town Forum of the key focus of the 'Vision', namely how funding pressures on local government were leading TWBC to find improved ways of generating income through sound investment of its capital. The draft 'Vision', he added, reaffirmed TWBC's 'enabling' role; it was also a document that would develop during its lifetime and would be the subject of an annual reporting process to the authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Jukes advised.

Cllr Jukes responded to some of the issues raised through the public consultation phase. He advised that not every issue had been included in the document, because the Council had tried to keep it manageable in size and content. This explained why, for instance, 'Brighton Mainline 2' had not been included, as TWBC's capacity to influence its future was almost nil, Cllr Jukes advised. Similarly, on highways issues, the Leader advised that TWBC was not the lead authority, although he added that the working relationship between Kent Highways and TWBC was very good at present.

Cllr Jukes advised that he was a member of the newly-formed South East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), through which TWBC might be able to secure funding for strategic improvements, but there were absolutely no guarantees, he added.

Cllr Jukes also reported on the progress of the road improvement scheme taking place in **Longfield Road**, aimed at alleviating traffic congestion. He advised that the engineering works on this 12 month project would begin in May.

The Chairman invited Town Forum members to comment on the draft 'Vision'.

- June Bridgeman raised two aspects: (a) that the content of the 'Vision' indicated to her that this was less of a vision, more a five-year plan; and (b) that her working group's response to TWBC's draft 'Green Infrastructure Plan SPD' (item 7(b) in the agenda papers) contained much that was relevant to what TWBC should be striving for, namely a joining up of the green spaces across the town centre, as part of a development master plan;
- Jane Fenwick believed that TWBC should adopt a bolder, aspirational position in terms of the highway infrastructure it would like to see, beyond the next five years. The draft 'Vision' was, she added, as opportunity to set out

what TWBC planned to achieve in the longer term, including relief roads, if that is what was felt to be the most cost-effective congestion remedy;

- Sally Balcon was concerned at the reference in the draft 'Vision' to the possible 'encroachment on green space', to address traffic congestion. If this meant part of Tunbridge Wells Common, she added, it was important to remember the value of the town's asset, both in its natural beauty and educational benefit as well as a tourist attraction;
- Michael Holman questioned whether the draft 'Vision' was as inspirational and aspirational as it could be. He believed that the great value of a vision document was in its spelling out how improvement could be achieved, phrased in terms that harmonised with Tunbridge Wells and disposed its citizens to support it. As an example, he added, he felt the Foreword would benefit from stressing that the Borough's cultural history was embedded in its landscape, its geology and in its health-giving waters. It was on this spa heritage that the Vision should take its inspiration, Mr Holman stressed;

Mr Holman said that the 'next steps' approach set out in the draft 'Vision' was to be welcomed, adding that he would also like to see a timescale added where actions were listed. Finally, he felt it important to set out clearly how the 'Vision' would be embedded in TWBC's other planning processes;

- Lorna Blackmore asked if KCC could obtain EU funding for some of the infrastructure projects that would benefit the Borough. Cllr Jukes stressed that the EU bidding process was through the LEP, to which he referred earlier, adding that the South East grouping of local authorities would need to determine where the greatest priorities lay;
- Adrian Cory referred to the 'challenges and opportunities' section of the draft 'Vision' and enquired why the document appeared not to address the pockets of deprivation which existed in the town area. Cllr Jukes acknowledged the point made, adding that tackling deprivation most certainly remained one of the authority's priorities;
- On the transport issues raised, Mark Booker referred to data that showed that approximately 86% of the town's traffic originated and terminated in the town, leading to the conclusion that relief roads were not the best solution to tackle congestion. He also reminded the group that a 1998 scheme for use of a section of Tunbridge Wells Common would have reduced journey times by no more than 15 seconds. His conclusion was, therefore, that the real objective was to encourage people out of their car usage, particularly for journeys of less than two miles;
- Alastair Tod referred to the draft 'Vision' statement on the future of the civic complex, where it stated that "...the Council will be developing a clear framework for the re-development of this site". He asked for some clarity over the use of the word "re-development";
- Philip Whitbourn suggested that it should more accurately state '... the future of the site...' rather than 're-development';
- June Bridgeman felt that the use of the word 'confident' in the document should really be more about people's well-being, adding that she would like to see more emphasis on the provision of facilities and services for those who were generally less well-off.

Cllr Jukes responded to the issues on traffic and transport, advising that the town had a long history of proposals for relief roads and other congestion-alleviation schemes. He remained of the view that there was little prospect of by-passes or relief roads, as there seemed to be no opportunity to impose such an infrastructure without creating significant opposition across the Borough.

The Chairman next turned to the recommended response of the Town Forum's Management Committee to the draft 'Vision' document; the detailed response had been circulated with the agenda. Cllr Jukes picked up on the 'parks and open spaces' comment by saying that no-one should have any concerns about Dunorlan Park; he added that, as a further example of TWBC's commitments towards the town's parks, funding had been secured from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the submission of a scheme for Grosvenor and Hilbert Park.

Mr Holman reminded Town Forum members that, as individuals, they were being encouraged to respond to the draft 'Vision' document via TWBC's website. The deadline for comments was Friday 28 March.

In summary, the Chairman acknowledged that the Leader of the Council was keen on delivering progress and improvement for the Borough, which was – generally – to be welcomed. However, the points raised in the Town Forum Management Committee's draft response, coupled with the issues summarised above, highlighted where issues of concern remained, the Chairman added.

Adam Chalmers advised that all of these matters would be fed back into the public consultation process, which would go before the Cabinet on 10 April. The Chairman expressed the hope that the Town Forum's views, which represented a large part of the un-parished area of the Borough, would have a certain weight attached to them.

RESOLVED – That the draft response of the Town Forum's Management Committee, as supplemented by the summary of issues above, be approved and submitted to the Borough Council.

6. LOCALISM 'PROSPECTUS'

Adam Chalmers explained that the Cabinet portfolio-holder and the Director of Change and Communities had both had to give their apologies for absence for this item. He explained how the Localism 'Prospectus' had been prepared by TWBC, with the intention that parish and town councils, as well as local organisations and community groups, might work with the Borough Council in order to re-design and improve the delivery of some specific services; a list of services considered appropriate for this initiative was set out in the agenda papers, which included the report submitted to the Cabinet on this issue, dated 27 February.

Whilst emphasising that the key focus of the Prospectus was on parish and town councils, Mr Chalmers particularly invited expressions of interest in the services listed on page 27 of the agenda, adding that there was a full list of contact names set out in the agenda for those groups who wished to explore the initiative further.

Cllr Scott advised that one of the items listed in the report under the 'Community Right to Bid (assets of community value)' section – the Royal Oak public house in Tunbridge Wells, in which he had been involved – had provided a positive benefit in bring a particular section of the community together, as well as putting into action their right to attempt to retain a valuable asset.

The Chairman, David Wakefield, asked what the significance was of listing the Remembrance Sunday service under 'community events' suitable for community groups etc to run. Mr Chalmers explained that it was just an example, adding that this was more appropriate for services that were held in the Borough's parish and town council areas.

Sally Balcon, in referring to the general principle of community groups taking on responsibility, reminded members that a significant number of 'Friends of ...' groups were already in existence. She felt that more liaison between TWBC and these groups would mean that joint objectives could be achieved more quickly.

Mary Wardrop drew attention to the fact that the report made no mention of the 'unparished area' of the Borough; she felt this was significant in terms of what was realistic and that this should be highlighted.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted at this stage.

7. STREET CLEANING IN TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Dorothea Holman explained the problems that members of Boyne Park Residents' Association (BPRA) had been suffering with (a) street cleaning and (b) gully emptying. It was noted that, in the case of (a), this was a TWBC service, while with (b), KCC was the responsible local authority.

The main issue with both services, Mrs Holman advised, was that parked vehicles prevented a thorough service from being undertaken. Since giving notice of this problem, she added, TWBC's contractor, Cory, had been in contact with her to advise that they would give advance notice of their visits to the streets covered by the BPRA by placing notices in the road, asking motorists not to park, in order to gain access to all areas. Mrs Holman added that, to date, she had not been so successful with KCC in trying to achieve the same advance notice.

- Angela Phillips advised that a similar problem existed in Culverden Park Road, adding that failure to undertake gully emptying had caused a significant problem in Woodbury Park Cemetery during this past winter.
- Jane Fenwick felt that, despite the difficulties being experienced, the pressures on street parking were so great that she could not see any acceptable remedy in the short term.
- Adam Chalmers advised that, if any resident felt that the street cleaning contract was not being properly operated, the first action to take was to make a formal complaint to TWBC – either by phone or via the website. That should prompt an inspection and investigation by TWBC contract monitoring staff, he advised.
- Mr Chalmers added that TWBC was fully prepared to work with local resident groups to try and find a solution which, he added, might require some individuals or groups placing signs in their streets, to prevent parking prior to the contractor's visit.
- Léonie Harrington, on behalf of KCC, added that the same approach should be followed for the gully emptying service. In the first instance, she advised, residents might wish to e-mail her and she would take the matter up with the contract manager.
- Mary Wardrop enquired whether the same advice should be followed under other circumstances, such as autumn leaves blocking gullies. Mr Chalmers advised that a formal complaint would be followed up and acted upon in the same way.

- June Bridgeman felt that the division of responsibility between TWBC and KCC for these services was a key issue. She added that there needed to be effective liaison with the residents concerned, which would allow each group to take the necessary action.
- Cllr Bulman believed that the onus was clearly on the contractor to put out advance notice signs, not on individuals or groups of residents.
- John Cunningham felt that the problem stemmed from a lack of close supervision of contractors and/or reluctance to penalise past failures to maintain required standards.
- Mr Chalmers advised that there was an effective monitoring and auditing process in place for this contract, adding that regular meetings were held with representatives of the contractor. He added that, on the issues raised by Mrs Bridgeman and by Cllr Bulman, he would discuss with the Head of Environment and Street Scene whether either or both of these suggestions were practical.
- The issues which had been highlighted above prompted Jane Fenwick to suggest that the time had arrived when the highway service should be returned to district council control, as had been the case under the earlier agency arrangements.
- Cllr Scott felt that preventing vehicles from parking ahead of street cleaning or gully emptying would be difficult to achieve, because of the problem associated with the displacement of cars. He added that the situation was made more difficult because some vehicles were parked not on a daily basis but in the same location for longer periods. Cllr Scott also linked the current problem with that of temporary repairs to highway potholes; he acknowledged that, on occasions, it had been necessary this past winter to effect temporary repairs but he felt that there was evidence that a more permanent remedy was being overlooked.

In concluding the discussion, the Chairman welcomed the positive response from both the TWBC and KCC to the specific issue raised, which he hoped would lead to a permanent remedy.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That residents who feel that the street cleaning contract is not being performed adequately make a formal complaint to TWBC, whose Street Scene Enforcement team will inspect and take up with the contractor;
- (2) That where the same problem occurs with KCC's gully emptying service, residents contact Léonie Harrington, KCC's Community Engagement Officer, who will take the issue up with their contracts manager; and
- (3) That Adam Chalmers discuss the other suggestions made with TWBC's Head of Environment and Street Scene and report back on the outcome.

8. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – The Chairman, Michael Holman, reported on the progress being made on possible water features at the following sites:

Longfield Road, North Farm – where he advised that discussions were taking place, looking at the practicalities of installing a water feature at each of the new roundabouts

which were being provided as part of the congestion relief road scheme. Cllr Scott had been involved in these discussions. He advised that the key problem with this proposal was that the scheme programme had already been agreed so, while TWBC was giving its backing to this initiative, the opportunity to provide connections to water and electricity as part of the overall scheme was extremely limited in time. Cllr Scott added that he was trying to apply as much political pressure as possible, to find a remedy;

Care home in Mount Ephraim – Michael Holman advised that there were proposals for a care home in Mount Ephraim where a water feature was planned for the garden area. He added that he was hopeful that the scheme design would enable the feature to be viewed more generally from Mount Ephraim, rather than being solely for the benefit of the residents;

Grosvenor and Hilbert Park – Michael Holman circulated photos of the former fountain in this park, which was ‘de-commissioned’ in 1941;

Fiveways – Michael Holman advised that the Leader of the Council had asked him where the Water in the Wells group would wish to have the water and electricity supply so as to make possible the installation of a water feature as part of the Fiveways public realm scheme. He added that it was difficult to be certain on this point, as a key element was whether TWBC was planning to relocate the Millennium Clock as part of the overall proposal. Mr Holman advised that discussions with RVP shopping centre operators had shown that they were fully supportive of a water feature within Fiveways;

Union House, Pantiles – Michael Holman advised that, from an architectural and an engineering perspective, this location was considered to be ideal for a water feature. He added that some modern constructions had the capability of being dismantled and re-positioned; this was of particular significance in this location, he advised, while the longer term future of Union House was being debated. With that in mind, he suggested that the provision of a water feature at Union House was suitable for inclusion within TWBC’s draft ‘Vision’ document;

Other issues – Prof Holman advised that, as part of the Twinning Association’s 25th anniversary of the signing of the Twinning Charter, Wiesbaden’s Lord Mayor, Sven Gerich, would be visiting Tunbridge Wells in July and, as part of his programme, be opening a photographic exhibition entitled ‘Wiesbaden, Water and the Wells: 25 Years of Twinning’.

Michael Doyle advised that Dandara, the developers of the proposed Knights Park development, had now opened an office in Calverley Road; he reminded Forum members of their support for a water feature as part of the development at Knights Park. Michael Holman advised that discussions had already been held with Dandara, with a view to a water feature being provided within the community space at Knights Park, which would provide an important link with the water heritage of Tunbridge Wells.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – June Bridgeman, Chairman of this working group, advised that she was keen to convene a meeting of all of the ‘Friends of ...’ groups, to improve co-ordination between them.

On the issue of TWBC’s Destination Management Plan, and specifically the working group which had been established by TWBC, Mrs Bridgeman was keen to ensure that the views of the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group were submitted and considered.

Mrs Bridgeman also reiterated the importance of the Green Infrastructure Plan – Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), upon which her working group had submitted a formal response, as part of TWBC's public consultation process. A copy of that response had been circulated with the agenda papers.

Mrs Bridgeman emphasised the relevance and significance of having some form of green framework plan in place, which would link the green spaces in the town, but alongside a proper town development plan – the latter being absent from the Borough Council's suite of strategies, she felt.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the update report be noted; and
- (2) That the working group's response to TWBC's consultation on its draft Green Infrastructure Plan SPD, as set out in the agenda, be endorsed.

Traffic Strategy Working Group – The Acting Chairman, Jane Fenwick, had submitted an update report with the agenda, which covered the main areas of activity since the last Town Forum meeting.

Mrs Fenwick advised that TWBC's Transport Strategy had once more been delayed in its submission for final approval. Alongside this issue, Mrs Fenwick reported that members of the working group had met with TWBC's Parking Manager, Rosemarie Bennett, to discuss the development of the emerging Parking Strategy. She added that discussions with Mrs Bennett had been very encouraging.

Mrs Fenwick told the Forum that John Barber, the Chairman of the Friends of the Commons group, wished to see some formal crossing points installed, to provide safer access to Tunbridge Wells Common; she asked for the Town Forum's 'in principle' support for that proposal as well as for seeing this incorporated into the Transport Strategy.

Mrs Bridgeman saw this proposal as emphasising the issue which she had just highlighted, namely the importance of establishing a green framework plan, which would link these issues together, within the context of an over-arching town development plan.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the progress report be accepted; and
- (2) That the Town Forum endorses the proposal by the Friends of the Commons to see formal crossing points implemented, to provide safer access on to Tunbridge Wells Common.

Planning and Development Strategy – Michael Doyle, Chairman of this working group, drew attention to his agenda report, which explained how TWBC was proceeding in its evaluation of formal submissions made to the draft Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD).

He added that TWBC was still having to respond to developers' proposals, ahead of the Site Allocations DPD process being finalised next year; this was not an ideal position to have to face, he added, and placed the planning authority at risk in maintaining its current housing policy.

Mr Doyle also reported on the latest position re. AXA PPP and their Hawkenbury office site. He stated that their plans to build a parking 'deck' – as part of their expansion proposals – would not now proceed, leaving him to believe that local residents would be faced with yet more on-street parking.

Cllr Bulman thanked Mr Doyle for sharing the latest position on the AXA site, adding that he would be looking to call in the planning application. Cllr Mrs Mayhew advised that she had already triggered that process.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that there were no additional items to report from within his working group's remit.

9. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE TOWN FORUM'S CONSTITUTION

The Chairman, David Wakefield, reported on the work of the Town Forum's Management Committee, which had met to consider how minor changes to the Forum's Constitution might encourage more nominations to come forward for the key roles of Chairman and the two Vice-Chairmen positions.

The principal amendment set out in the agenda papers was to propose that the Chairman should be elected from amongst all member organisation representatives, rather than from the narrower field of resident association delegates.

The opportunity had also been taken to suggest a few other, minor, amendments, to reflect the actual working arrangements of the Forum's Management Committee.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the proposals could not be formally agreed at this meeting, as any changes to the Constitution could only be made at the AGM or an EGM, following proper notice, as set out in the Constitution.

Alastair Tod enquired whether 'member organisations' included the Borough Council. He was advised that TWBC was not a member organisation.

Michael Holman felt that the Town Forum had functioned very well over the past two years, under its working group structure. He added that the 'burden' on the Chairman was now shared amongst the chairmen of the working groups, a situation which had helped significantly in this improved overall position.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the schedule of proposed amendments to the Constitution, as set out in the agenda, be approved in principle; and
- (2) That the Town Forum consider this issue formally on 29 May, under an 'extraordinary general meeting' section of the agenda that same evening, where the formal decision can be taken.

10. TWBC CONSULTATION ISSUES

Mike McGeary, TWBC's Democratic Services Officer, introduced an extract from the latest version of TWBC's Forward Plan, in which he drew attention to issues of general interest to the Town Forum which were being considered by the Cabinet in the coming months. It was presented for information only.

Alex Green enquired if members of the public were able to attend the Cabinet meetings, to observe proceedings. Mr McGeary confirmed that this was the case, adding that members of the public could also register to speak on specific issues at the Cabinet meeting, for a maximum of three minutes on each matter, subject to them registering their wish to do so, prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Young Persons' Travel Pass – Michael Doyle advised that he had followed up on one of KCC's consultation issues, namely the proposal to replace the Kent Freedom Pass with a 'Young Persons' Travel Pass'. He felt the changes being proposed were reasonable and should be supported by the Town Forum.

Jane Fenwick asked whether the cost of the new pass (£200) was required to be paid in one sum or broken down into staged payments. She also asked what the impact was on pupils who travelled from Tunbridge Wells to schools in East Sussex, i.e. out of the county. Mrs Fenwick added that, as with highway services, this was another aspect of being a border community, where she felt that cross-border co-operation and linked strategic thinking was important.

Subsequent to the meeting, it has been confirmed that: (a) payment for the new pass can be split into two payments of £100 each, across the academic year; and (b) it is believed that the new pass will still allow pupils to undertake "direct journeys to neighbouring councils, where the journey starts or finishes within the KCC area".

Mary Wardrop asked whether the mileage being travelled from home to school was still a factor in qualifying for the pass. Léonie Harrington advised that neither the current pass nor the new one was based on mileage.

The Chairman, in summing up, asked Mike McGeary to submit a supportive response to KCC, as part of the public consultation process.

RESOLVED – That Mike McGeary, Administrator to the Town Forum, respond to KCC, indicating the Town Forum's support for the proposed 'Young Persons' Travel Pass'.

(b) Street lighting and the 'part-night operation' – Léonie Harrington advised that, with the clocks going forward by one hour for British Summer Time on 30 March, the period during which certain street lights would be switched off would be from 1am until 6.30am.

(c) Tunbridge Wells in Bloom – Katharina Mahler-Bech advised that the 2014 Tunbridge Wells in Bloom season would be launched on 11 April.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 29 May 2014 at 6.30pm – which will include an 'extraordinary general meeting' section, to discuss the suggested Constitutional changes set out in minute 9 above.

Subsequent meetings:

10 July, 25 September and 27 November (including the AGM)

The meeting concluded at 8.20pm.