



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Draft Minutes of Meeting 20 December 2005

Present: Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Jennifer Blackburn (Rusthall Village Association), Graham Bradley (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Bruce Goodwin (Grove Hill Residents' Association), Matt Goodwin (Tunbridge Wells Village Residents' Association), Michael Hicks (Inner London Road Residents' Association), John Higgs (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), David Lock (Chancellor House Freehold Ltd), Ian Naismith (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), Alton Omer (Benhall Mill Road Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Road Association), Christine Phillip (Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association), Fred Sirman (Warwick Park Residents' Association), Chris Thomas (The Goodwins No 1/No 2 Residents' Company), Gill Twells (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association), David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association), Cllr Peter Crawford, Cllr Adrian Ekins-Daukes, Cllr Leonard Price, Cllr David Wakefield

In attendance: Cllr Roy Bullock, Ellie Broughton, Estelle Grant (to and including item 5), Gary Stevenson

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Patrick Shovelton and Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew.

2. Membership changes

The Chairman said he had received a notice of resignation from Jeremy Syers who has recently moved house and no longer lives in the town (note: he has written to Jeremy thanking him for his help in the formative stage of the Town Forum and with the SEERA response).

3. Minutes of the Meeting 29 November 2005

The minutes were approved.

4. Matters Arising from the Meeting of 29 November 2005

All matters were on the agenda with the exception of noting that:

- Daniel Bech had not received any on-line comments from members about the proposed alcohol control zone. It was agreed he should design an on-line Forum on the website in order to give people the opportunity to add comments on whatever they feel is important (ie as opposed to simply giving them information to comment on) and to encourage comments from 'the outside world'.
- The Courier had provided coverage as discussed.
- There were two actions from November which were still carried forward for future consideration (see item 10)

ACTION POINT: Daniel Bech to design on-line Forum for the Town Forum website.

5. Community Plan – follow up to Networking Event and next steps

- i) TWBC response to Community Plan sub-committee response

A copy of the sub-committee's response, also viewable on the Town Forum's website, was circulated.

Estelle Grant thanked the sub-committee for their submission on the developing Community Plan. She confirmed that all comments received would be analysed and reported to the Community Plan Partnership who would consider them and update the draft priorities and objectives accordingly.

Meanwhile comments are still welcome until the deadline of 3 January 2006.

Once the priorities and objectives have been amended an action plan for each will be drawn up and a draft Plan published for formal consultation in May & June. Estelle said she hoped that there would continue to be ongoing dialogue throughout the process however.

ii) Networking event

Estelle reminded members that the aim of the recent networking event at the Spa Hotel had been for all the different groups involved in the development and implementation of the Community Plan to identify opportunities for productive joint working. She circulated a copy of the Town Forum's response to the priorities and notes from the Town Forum's group on the day and urged members not to lose sight of their ideas for actions from the day. She asked the Town Forum to prioritise and progress their proposals.

As an example she said that one suggestion had been to working with the High Weald Project, Civic Society and others on proposals to rejuvenate the Happy Valley and High Rocks area. Jenny Blackburn asked that the Friends of the Common and the Commons Conservators be invited to be involved if this idea is to be progressed.

Daniel Bech, representing the Community Plan sub-committee, referred to the minutes of their recent meeting and invited comments. He suggested that members take them home and let him have comments before the closing deadline.

Commander Lawson added that the sub-committee had used the 'cross-cutting' issues document as the basis for their discussions.

ACTION POINTS:

- Members to submit their comments to Daniel Bech for him to submit a Town Forum response to the Council by 3 January 2006.
- The sub-committee to prioritise suggested actions arising from the networking day and recommend proposals on how these might be progressed to the January meeting of the Town Forum (Daniel Bech).

6. Grot spot update

Gary Stevenson summarised Council action since the last meeting:

- The Greyhound Pub – section 215 notice served and complied with
- 18 Victoria Road – On 1 December Mr Perfect, the owner, was found guilty of not complying with an Enforcement Notice issued by the Council ordering him to clear up his property. He was fined £1,000 with an additional £55 to be paid towards costs. He has a deadline to complete all clearing works within three months.
- Others – currently being assessed as to what action to be prioritised and taken.

Meanwhile he was pleased to note that the local Member of Parliament, Greg Clark, had picked up on the state of the station in a recent Courier article, bringing extra pressure to bear.

He also advised members of an imminent Empty Homes Council initiative. Being led by the Council's housing team the aim is to get some of the borough's 500 empty homes back into use. Officers are currently in the process of writing to the owner (or person registered for Council Tax purposes) of each property outlining what potential help might be available to them, for example through Housing Associations or grant assistance. Gary said that the project potentially delivered three benefits: increased housing; improved street scene; and prevention of anti-social behaviour.

Michael Hicks drew attention to the state of 73 Inner London Road which he believed to be potentially dangerous. Gary said he would liaise with Building Control colleagues within the next few days to seek their advice / action.

Michael Doyle said that 30 Warwick Park must also be unsound given it has a tree growing through it. This was reinforced by Fred Sirman who said he would like to report back to his Residents' Association in January as to what action is being taken or proposed. Gary said that the police had been in touch with the Council over crime and disorder concerns and that the Council had written to the owner. He confirmed the property is of high priority from TWBC's point of view.

Jenny Blackburn asked for the process of members getting 'grot spots' onto the Town Forum's and Council's list of priorities.

– Members should send an e-mail to website@townforum.org.uk and report the spot with information on Where, When and What's wrong.

The focus group 'Brighten up Royal Tunbridge Wells' will identify a reported 'grot spot', take a picture, note the location and put it into the register the sub-committee started drawing up. When the register is in its first draft the sub-committee shall submit it to Gary Stevenson and, after this, put the register online.

Daniel Bech asked what was proposed for the bandstand in Calverley Park and other members said they had heard conflicting reports. Gary offered to liaise with Leisure Services' colleagues on the Town Forum's behalf. Daniel asked for the Council to involve the Town Forum in appraising options before deciding on a course of action. Councillor Wakefield asked for an assurance that the bandstand would be 'left alone' until after 18 June as events are already committed to take place there. Michael Holman reiterated this point: indeed he had already sought assurances from the Council and not received a reply. Councillor Bullock advised that nothing definitive had been agreed about the future of the bandstand and said that he thought that consultation with the Town Forum by the Council was possible.

Cllr Peter Crawford drew attention to Ropers Gate, Ramslye where two shops have been boarded up for ten years. High Weald Housing Association is not interested in buying them. He has recently heard that the Post Office owner is interested in taking over these two shops which are currently vandalised weekly.

Cllr Len Price asked Gary who he / others should contact about 'grot spots'. Gary said he was happy to be the first point of contact for issues around the visual appearance of properties. Different people led on different aspects, he said, and he would endeavour to ensure that the right people were involved. Councillor Price asked Gary to keep the sub-committee informed about TWBC activity on the 'grot spots'.

Gill Twells updated members on Ptolemy Dean's recent street light complaint covered by the Courier. Since writing to Chris Briggs, Head of Highways and Transportation at TWBC, he had received a reply from Lene Beynon saying that Kent Highways were of the view that the lamp standard was 'beyond economic repair'. Ptolemy wanted to know how that view had been reached: if they meant it needed a heritage lantern and a proper repaint he did believe the assessment of 'beyond economic repair' to be justified. Gill said that she understood the residents of Bedford Terrace had to contribute to the cost of the new lamp standard. Meanwhile Ptolemy's research had revealed the original lamp standard to be older than previously thought, dating back to 1860, confirming it to be precious to the town's heritage and worthy of reinstatement. Another Civic Society member had advised the Society that she was aware of comparable lampposts in the Town.

Councillor Bullock confirmed that it is Kent County Council (KCC) who is responsible for street lighting. The Chairman expressed the view that it was depressing for the Town Forum to have to spend time and energy talking about a lamppost.

Councillor Bullock suggested that if the Civic Society were pursuing the issue the Town Forum should not confuse the issue by getting involved. What the Town Forum could usefully do, he said, was to ensure that KCC maintain the high standards that the Borough Council had tried to maintain in Conservation Areas when highways had been under their jurisdiction. He believed there had been other recent examples of not replacing 'like with like'. Both he and Daniel Bech offered to liaise with their contacts at KCC and to explore with the relevant County Councillor (Councillor James Scholes) the scope for some of his local grant fund to be allocated for restoration of the lamppost.

Jane Fenwick wondered if there was an agreed 'design standard' and Councillor Bullock said he had been pushing for an agreement between TWBC and KCC where Conservation Areas are concerned. Michael Doyle said he believed that the BC still had responsibility for 'a watching brief' over KCC highways activities.

Councillor Bullock said that the Borough Council undertakes a rolling programme of Conservation Area Appraisals and Gill Twells confirmed that the last one for Royal Tunbridge Wells had been completed approximately five years ago. The next is currently scheduled for 2008. Councillor Bullock advised that it is important for the Town Forum to identify valued features in the appraisals when the opportunity arises. However, he pointed out that the appraisals don't address other parts of the town outside the Conservation Area so it is also important that policies are developed which protect special characteristics.

Michael Hicks reported that at Inner London Road where there had been similar issues in the past a design was found within the system that was acceptable there.

ACTION POINTS:

Cllr Roy Bullock and / or Gary Stevenson to liaise with Leisure colleagues at TWBC to seek:

- Town Forum involvement in considering options for the Bandstand's future; and
- Confirmation about the bandstand's availability for the events that had been planned.

Gary Stevenson to keep the sub-committee advised of TWBC actions on 'grot spot' properties

Cllr Bullock to liaise with the Civic Society and the County Councillor to see what might be done about the lamppost.

Town Forum and Council to take an interest in standards of highways and related action.

7. TWBC response to Licensing Sub-Committee

As a general point the Chairman asked sub-committees to come prepared to summarise their proposals at Town Forum meetings when a Borough Officer is attending to respond an earlier submission.

Gary Stevenson thanked the sub-committee for its work and submission to the Council. He said it was important for the Borough Council to hear and respond to local stakeholders and the Town Forum's activities were particularly valuable. Both he and his colleague Linda Mortley, Community Development and Safety Manager, had considered the proposal from Environmental and Crime and Disorder perspectives respectively. He summarised feedback as follows:

Out-of-hours complaints – if a criminal incident is thought to be taking place residents should dial 999 for the police. If there is a very loud nuisance occurring residents could phone the Council: an out-of-hours service operates in emergency situations, and more generally the noise team will log and investigate complaints. Recently a patrol has started to take place every three to four weeks to check that licence agreements are being adhered to and to investigate reported incidents and complaints. Whilst he does not have the resources to offer an immediate response, other than for emergency situations, the Council does follow up complaints and undertakes proactive visits to identify premises where action is required. Gary offered to ensure information about the process be made available through the Town Forum's website.

Two way communication between the Police and Borough Council – there is a good working relationship with the Police with Council officers having almost daily contact with the Police's licensee officers. Inevitably there will be occasions when residents might be referred on to the Police by the Council or vice versa but hopefully the reason for this would be made clear.

Liaison between Landlords – as part of the Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership activities Pubwatch has been set up with regular meetings between landlords (approximately 30 town centre landlords), the Police and the Safe Town Partnership. Within Pubwatch landlords can issue exclusion notices against offenders. Finally the Shopsafe radio scheme links shops to each other, and other licensed premises to CCTV control enabling fast communication and action about suspected shoplifters and disorderly people.

Gary said that Linda Mortley had offered members of the sub-committee the opportunity to visit the CCTV unit and for a representative to attend a future Pubwatch meeting. Thirdly she was willing to attend a future meeting of the Town Forum to show a film recently made by the Local Government Association featuring management of the night-time economy in Royal Tunbridge Wells (considered a model of good practice) and to deal with any issues that the Town Forum might wish to raise.

Christopher Thomas, as Chairman of the sub-committee, thanked Gary for a very informative response. He believes the big thing is to do with the complaints register: sources, making sure it is kept up-to-date and understanding the criteria used to prioritise complaints. He said the sub-committee would be delighted to accept Linda Mortley's invitations and requested clarification about how complaints can be made, i.e. in GS's proposed note for the website. He said some concerns remain about the two-way liaison.

Bruce Goodwin said he had corresponded with GS about an ongoing nuisance in Grove Hill involving licensed premises regularly remaining open until 2 / 3am. He said that the Borough Council's Licensing Committee had turned down their application for extended hours but they continue to breach the terms of their licence and noise and litter nuisance has occurred every night for the last three months. The Chairman asked Gary to respond. Gary said there were two aspects:

- firstly the planning condition and planners have brought the breach of terms to the attention to the landowner, and a notice is about to be – or has already been – issued.
- secondly Gary Stevenson's officers were collecting evidence with a view to acting shortly.

Councillor Len Price asked if Gary was getting the necessary support from the Council's legal department or if there were delays. Gary was reassuring, saying that the service does now have increased resources and that work was being processed within a reasonable time.

Cllr Peter Crawford told members about an incident at the weekend near Park Road resulting in glass on the highways which he had reported but which was not actioned quickly enough and he had had to sweep glass up himself. Gary was not personally aware of the incident and offered to speak to Peter separately outside the meeting.

The Chairman referred Gary back to a comment he had made at the start of the item about how the sub-committee's work had been helpful. Gary expanded saying that it was useful for him and his colleagues to get residents' comments about the levels of service required, to raise issues they hadn't themselves thought of; and guidance about what information and publicity should be undertaken. The Chairman said that feedback of this nature was useful for the Town Forum, indicating the lines on which the Town Forum is being effective and thus helping it to develop.

ACTION POINTS:

- Gary Stevenson to provide information for the Town Forum website.
- The sub-committee to accept Linda Mortley's invitations to visit the CCTV unit and attend a Pubwatch meeting.
- Linda Mortley to be invited to a future Town Forum meeting.

8. Current and forthcoming consultation documents and opportunities

Matt Goodwin introduced this item saying he was seeking an overview to the strategic and consultative framework in order to better understand how the Town Forum could effectively influence policies affecting the development of the town.

Ellie Broughton said that her colleague Tony Fullwood, Head of Strategy and Development, would be attending the next meeting of the Town Forum to talk about the Local Development Framework and that he would also be well placed to deal with queries about the wider strategic framework. Meanwhile in order to progress the item she circulated and presented a summary of strategic and other documents and timetables for consultation and involvement. This included Kent Partnership, County, Borough Plan Partnership, NHS and Borough Council issues and she also said she had made the Chairman aware of two current consultative papers from the Government on housing and on planning gain.

It was agreed that the Town Forum should take an active interest in the Kent Vision and that a sub-committee, based around members of the SEERA sub-committee, should meet before the next Town Forum meeting in order to propose a formal response within the timescale. Daniel Bech said that problems with Kent County Council's electronic links for on-line consultation had been resolved and he and Councillor Bullock agreed to consider, outside the meeting, whether KCC / the Kent Partnership should be asked to extend the consultation deadline in view of the fact that the system had not been working.

Matt asked if the Planning Policy Guidance 3 on Housing would still exist or be overtaken by the new government paper on housing. Councillor Bullock confirmed it would remain in place for the time being although an officer might take account of the emerging guidance and an inspector would judge how much weight to give to each document.

On the wider issue of sub-committees the Chairman encouraged all members to play a role. Mary Wardrop suggested that members could encourage colleagues from their Residents' Associations to play a role. Councillor Bullock reiterated this, reminding members that the Council relied on them, as representatives of their Residents Association, to keep fellow residents informed and updated, and to encourage their involvement.

Jenny Blackburn suggested members might just volunteer for the specific parts of the local development framework that they were interested in, rather than committing themselves more fully.

Both Mary's and Jenny's suggestions were welcomed and agreed as a sensible way forward.

Jane Fenwick singled out the Recreation and Open Space policy as a potential area of interest for the Town Forum and proposed that potential sub-committee volunteers get themselves up-to-speed on related issues in anticipation. This was agreed.

Councillor Bullock answered a couple of queries: the proposed date for adoption of the Local Plan Review was confirmed as March 2006; and the Kent Minerals and Waste consultation is currently confined to the associated 'Statement of Community Interest'.

Gary Stevenson, on the issue of recycling, said that the Borough Council had allocated funding for a plastics recycling pilot next year. He said that doorstep collection of plastics had proved prohibitively expensive in the short-term (given the refuse contract is mid-term) but might be feasible in the longer term. Meanwhile the pilot would involve plastics recycling at existing recycling centres.

The Chairman said he looked forward to the next meeting and to hearing what Tony Fullwood has to say about how the various policies and documents fit together.

ACTIONS:

- Councillor Bullock to speak to Daniel and ask him if any action needed for him to take up with KCC about the on-line consultation on Kent Vision.
- Michael Doyle, Michael Larsen and any other volunteers to meet with Councillor Bullock and draft a response on the Kent Vision for consideration at the January meeting.
- Members interested in the Recreation and Open Space, or other aspects of the Local Development Scheme, to e-mail Matt Goodwin to identify themselves / their area of interest.
- Resident Association representatives to identify anyone in their associations as potential sub-committee members and e-mail Matt Goodwin accordingly.
- Individual members and their associations be encouraged to make their own on-line submissions on the Kent Vision.

9. Short announcements

Refuse collection – Gary Stevenson advised that all collections will be only one day late over Christmas and New Year but that bins should be out by 7am (information notes have been posted on bins and details are available through the Council's website). In mid-January a huge overhaul of collections is taking place so potentially both the day of collection, and the week of the recycling collection week, may change. Watch out for the bright leaflet coming shortly announcing the changes. Every property should receive a leaflet.

Cllr Ekins-Daukes proposed 'waste collection' be made an item for discussion at a future meeting. There was a discussion as to whether to wait for the consultation period or not: Cllr Ekins-Daukes thought it important to have the Town Forum's own policies and views in place first and Daniel Bech concurred. A wider discussion about being proactive on issues followed and it was agreed the Town Forum should be both proactive and reactive. Councillor Bullock said that as the Town Forum is still in its infancy and had not built a collective knowledge it needs to rely on the officers.

Jenny Blackburn said that changes to Council Tax and Local Government funding is likely in the medium term and would impact on all residents. She suggested that the Town Forum, as a forward-looking organisation, might give consideration to the issue.

10. Items for future meetings

- Local Development Framework (January).
- Proposed response on Kent Vision (Michael Larsen and others - January).
- Proposed priorities and actions for joint working on Community Plan issues (Daniel Bech and others – January).
- Crime and Disorder issues (Linda Mortley – date to be agreed).
- Waste collection (date to be agreed).
- Development of Residents' Associations, on-line resources and extension of membership (date to be agreed).

11. Any other business

Michael Doyle proposed a vote of thanks to Ellie Broughton, Estelle Grant, Gary Stevenson, Councillor Bullock and other Council representatives who had contributed their time and given guidance to the Town Forum, facilitating its effective working.

12. Dates of Future Meetings

Tuesday 17 January - Thursday 23 February - Monday 27 March - 24 April - 25 May - 22 June - 20 July