



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 21 May 2015

Attended: Cllr Bob Backhouse, Sally Balcon, Lindsay Barker (sub), David Barnett, Adrian Berendt, Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, June Bridgeman, Cllr Peter Bulman, David Bushell, Cllr Ben Chapelard, Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold, Adrian Cory, John Cunningham, Allan Gooda, Alex Green, Michaela van Halewyn, Bill Kern, Kyrios Kyriacou, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Helen Mitcham (sub), Cllr Tracy Moore, Chris Morris, Marguerita Morton, Nick Pope, Cllr David Scott, Alastair Tod (Chairman), David Wakefield (sub), Denise Watts, Cllr Lynne Weatherly and Pat Wilson

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

Also present: Cllr Paul Barrington-King (Portfolio-holder for Sustainability), Cllr David Jukes (Leader of TWBC) and Cllr Jane March (Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Cllr Ronen Basu, Stephen Bowser, Michael Doyle, Jane Fenwick, Tim Harper, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Sue Kaner, Cllr David Neve, Cllr Catherine Rankin, Cllr Don Sloan, Anne Stobo, Mary Wardrop, Cllr Frank Williams and Cllr Chris Woodward.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting dated 26 March 2015 were submitted for approval. There were no 'matters arising' beyond the action points set out in the following minute.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2015 be approved.

3. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

26 March 2015

4(e) Proposed holding company for managing residential properties

This had been actioned by e-mail, dated 31 March.

5 TWBC's Destination Management Plan

This had been actioned by e-mail, dated 15 April and is considered further under minute 8 below.

9 Future of Millennium Clock

This is covered under the update report from the Leader of the Council in minute 4(b) below.

9 '20 is plenty' road safety campaign

This was actioned by e-mail, dated 13 May.

10 Roundabouts

Mike McGeary read out the following update report, as provided by TWBC's Head of Environment and Street Scene:

Carrs Corner – Discussions were continuing with Kent Highways regarding TWBC's wish to take over responsibility for the maintenance of planting at this roundabout. He added that KCC had repaired the damaged stonework the previous weekend and had also replanted the roundabout.

Eridge Road – This roundabout would be planted by TWBC as part of the Tunbridge Wells in Bloom initiative. Due to the busy location of this roundabout, a roadworks' permit as well as a traffic management plan would both need to be in place for the planting work to take place; this was scheduled for the weekend of 6/7 June. Longer term, it was expected that planting would be a regular arrangement and winter planting would take place.

St John's Road/Mount Ephraim/Grosvenor Road – This was also a Kent Highways matter. It was reported that the roundabout markings had recently been repainted.

10 Engaging new TWBC members

The Chairman, Alastair Tod, advised that an invitation would shortly be issued to the five new TWBC councillors representing town centre wards, as well as to the other 14 – existing – members, to encourage greater engagement between TWBC elected members and the Town Forum more generally.

4. UPDATE REPORT FROM LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cllr David Jukes, Leader of the Council, reported on the following areas of interest:

(a) Annual Meeting of Council – Cllr Jukes advised that TWBC would be having its Annual Council Meeting the following week, after which he would ask Mike McGeary to circulate details of Cabinet, committee and board membership, for information. The Leader of the Council added that TWBC's approach for the year ahead would continue to see a focus on its enabling role, with further cost savings achieved and maintaining operational services to the same high standard.

Action: Mike McGeary to circulate details of Cabinet, committee and board membership, once these have been confirmed on 27 May.

(b) Five Ways Public Realm Scheme – Cllr Jukes reported that the highway running through this improvement scheme would be re-opened during the following week. He added that some minor work, plus rectifying some of the early stage paving, was still to be done, as well as re-styling of the base of the Millennium Clock. The Leader advised that there had been some concern within the Borough Council as

to the quality of some of the earlier work and that TWBC would be supervising the remedial stage. There would be no additional scheme costs to be met by TWBC, the Leader stressed.

Cllr Jukes also commented on how well the public realm initiative had been received – from shoppers and retailers alike; he added that there had been no complaints from bus or taxi operators during the construction phase. The Leader felt that the improved environment generated by the public realm scheme provided a strong case for banning bus routes from this part of the town centre, a proposal which he was keen to see take place.

Bill Kern, whilst welcoming the improvements to the town centre, expressed concern that, if traffic were to be permanently redirected along Church Road, the problems of congestion suffered during the construction phase would become routine, a situation which he felt should be avoided. He asked the Leader what plans existed to deal with the congestion problems in Church Road.

Cllr Jukes advised that, as a key part of finding a solution, he was keen to see a bus lay-by being provided in Church Road.

Denise Watts expressed concern about the possible adverse effect on elderly people if buses were banned from the town centre. Cllr Scott advised that, as part of the study on this issue which he had led on, he had proposed an option which would see a bus 'terminus' close to the Tesco store in Grosvenor Road, which he felt would address the concerns voiced by Mrs Watts. The Leader of the Council added that it was important to consider the 'no buses' proposal very carefully, taking account particularly of the impact on users; he was keen to find a solution which would provide benefit to all town centre users.

Cllr Bob Backhouse enquired what the latest position was with the **Millennium Clock**. Cllr Jukes advised that repairs to the Clock mechanism would take place shortly, adding that there were no plans at this stage to look at its relocation.

Cllr Barrington-King thanked members of the Town Forum for their public support for the Five Ways scheme. Specifically on the Millennium Clock, he advised that a new plinth would be provided, adding that electricity and water services had been installed in the immediate area, in readiness for a water feature, should plans for this proceed. Cllr Barrington-King advised that new benches and further bike racks would also be installed in the Clock area in the near future.

June Bridgeman asked when the TWBC draft Urban Design Framework document, approved by the Cabinet in March, would be issued for public consultation. She added that its context was relevant for the town centre improvements and proposals later, in the agenda item on the Tunbridge Wells Green Network. The Leader asked Mike McGeary to find this out and to advise the Town Forum accordingly.

Action: Mike McGeary to determine when TWBC would be re-considering the Urban Design Framework document again, following its consultation stage, and advise Town Forum members.

- (c) **Cultural and Learning Hub** – Cllr Jukes advised that progress on this project was continuing, adding that a decision on the stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund bid was expected at the end of July.
- (d) **Cinema site** – The Leader explained that a number of potential developers of this site had shown an interest in its purchase, with a range of ideas for its use being

proposed. He added that TWBC was firm in maintaining its position of wanting a mixed-use development of the site.

Sally Balcon reminded the meeting that there were two public footpaths which crossed the cinema site, which she urged should remain in place as part of any redevelopment of the site. Linked to that, Cllr Jukes advised that the lower part of the site, which lies to the south of one of the public footpaths, was not constrained by restrictive covenants, as was the case with the main part of the site.

- (e) **External assessment of TWBC** – Councillor Jukes said that, at a recent meeting with a representative of the Local Government Association, he had been advised that TWBC was now considered to be in the top tier of best-managed councils in the country. This, he added, was testament to the quality and commitment of the authority's staff.
- (f) **Post-payment car park system – Great Hall car park** – The Leader advised that, on 25 June, the Cabinet would be receiving a report on the results of the extended trial of the 'post-payment' system. He said that the report would first be considered by the Planning and Transportation Cabinet Advisory Board on 8 June, adding that the relevant portfolio-holder would be providing further update reports to the Forum at future meetings.
- (g) **Planning Support service** – Cllr Jukes reiterated that the Cabinet would also be considering a report at its August meeting regarding the future of the shared Planning Support service; he added that it was the Council's intention to withdraw this service from the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership, and return it to a TWBC stand alone operation.
- (h) **Warwick Park drainage** – The Leader advised that he had held discussions with Southern Water about the unacceptable flooding problems caused by the inadequate drainage in this area. Following an extensive survey by Southern Water, the cause of the flooding had finally been identified and remedial work was taking place.

Lindsay Barker advised that there remained some blocked drains which still required clearing. Subsequent to the meeting, it became apparent that Mrs Barker was referring to Boyne Park, and the Leader of the Council has undertaken to investigate what action TWBC can take to bring about a solution in this area.

There were no further action points arising from this report.

5. NEW COUNCILLORS, FOLLOWING 7 MAY TWBC ELECTIONS

A list of the councillors elected on to TWBC on 7 May had been circulated with the agenda. Those representing town wards had been highlighted in the list.

The Chairman, Alastair Tod, welcomed Cllr Moore (re-elected after a three-year break) to the meeting and congratulated Cllr Lynne Weatherly on her re-election.

6. GREEN NETWORK REPORT

Further to the discussion at the March meeting, Mark Booker introduced the 'Developing our Green Network' report, with its focus on safeguarding and enhancing Tunbridge Wells' green spaces, for the benefit of residents, visitors and the local economy, as well as improving health and helping to beat congestion in the town.

Mr Booker stressed that the report (and its recommendations) was cross-cutting in nature, with links to a number of the Town Forum's working groups in terms of its on-going work and benefits.

The report highlighted how safeguarding and enhancing Tunbridge Wells' green assets would lead to: economic development through increased tourism and leisure pursuits; maintenance of a 'sense of place'; reductions in traffic congestion through localised modal shift; improvements in road safety; abatement of atmospheric pollution; public health benefits, etc.

Attention was drawn to the principal outcomes from adoption of the report, including: the production of a large-scale master map, setting out the main green assets; a map of 'utility' walking and cycling routes through the town; a number of recommendations for safeguarding and enhancing the town's green spaces (including use of the planning system); outlines for a series of themed tourist trails, such as 'Rocks, Water and Royalty at the Wells'; and the following follow-up projects:

- Determining how tourist and green routes should be identified on the ground, through a uniform system of signage, how this might be achieved and financed, without adding to urban clutter; and
- Determining how a network of tourist information points could be established within the town and how the hotel, catering and other leisure and recreation trades may assist with their development and also benefit from them.

Mr Booker wished to record his thanks to everyone who had contributed towards the production of the report and who had assisted in its compilation and distribution.

The following issues were raised by Town Forum members:

- Denise Watts welcomed what she described as an excellent report. Her one point of concern was in its apparent acceptance that further housing - and other - development could be accommodated in the town. Mr Booker responded by saying that, if Town Forum members were serious about preserving the town's green spaces, it was better to increase the density of housing within the town centre, all of which would be within easy reach of existing green spaces.

Mrs Watts acknowledged the argument but still felt that young children growing up benefited more from having a garden of their own and a strong sense of neighbourliness.

- Marguerita Morton congratulated Mr Booker and his working group on the production of the report. She asked what actions were being recommended to address the problems brought about by traffic congestion.

Cllr Barrington-King responded. He advised that TWBC had already established a number of air pollution management zones, which provided a vital monitoring function. He added that one of the key contributors to poor air quality had been the older-style buses, particularly those providing school transport services. He advised that grant funding had been provided to some of those companies to enable them to purchase new vehicles which used cleaner technology. Cllr Barrington-King felt that TWBC was doing all that it could currently, to monitor the air quality situation and to work with bus companies in reducing harmful emissions.

- David Wakefield, on behalf of the Friends of Tunbridge Wells Commons, expressed the group's delight at having been involved in the production of the

Green Network report. He felt that, in terms of its wonderful green spaces, Tunbridge Wells – despite its smaller scale – could justifiably compare itself with some of England’s finest cities such as Bath.

- Adrian Berendt was another one who voiced his support for the report. He felt there was one aspect where its findings were perhaps on the pessimistic side, namely in what could be achieved through modal shifts, to enable greater use of cycling. He urged more support for segregated cycle routes in order to achieve that outcome, adding that there was also a good opportunity to link the town centres of Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge through such an initiative.
- Cllr Tracy Moore welcomed the focus given in the report on the need to improve pedestrian crossing facilities in the town centre.

The Chairman thanked all those who had contributed to both the report and the debate and congratulated Mr Booker and his working group for the thorough research and hard work that had underpinned the report and its recommendations.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the ‘Developing our Green Network’ report and its recommendations be endorsed;
- (2) That the contents of the report and its findings and recommendations be used to assist all the Town Forum’s working groups in their future work, wherever appropriate; and
- (3) That the Town Forum as a whole maintain a watching brief on the progress of the recommendations and specific actions and be involved in those actions wherever that is appropriate.

7. FORMING A TOWN COUNCIL: A DISCUSSION TOPIC

Parish Councillor Jenny Blackburn, Chairman of Rusthall Parish Council, had been due to make a short presentation on the procedure for establishing a parish/town council for Tunbridge Wells, as a discussion topic for the Town Forum.

In her absence, Adam Chalmers, TWBC’s Partnerships and Engagement Manager, provided a summary of the process, which had been based on the procedure followed for the creation of Rusthall Parish Council in 2011. Mr Chalmers advised on specific aspects such as: the number of petitioners needed to begin the process; the need for a formal ‘governance review’; the number of councillors such a council might have; set-up costs; and approximate running costs.

The following issues were raised by Town Forum members:

- David Wakefield advised that, three years ago, when the Town Forum was reviewing how it wished to conduct its future business, the formation of a town council was one of a number of options considered. At that stage, he added, there was very little support for the idea, most likely, he thought, because of the politics which would accompany it as well as the additional costs that might apply to council tax payers. Mr Wakefield advised that, after a recent discussion with Cllr Mrs Blackburn, he felt more confident about the option, adding that he now believed that a town council did not necessarily have to be political in its operation.

Mr Wakefield also believed that having a town council might be a more effective way of achieving some of the small gains that the Town Forum favoured, such as an improved tourist signage scheme. He also raised the issue of just what services a town council might wish to see transferred to it from TWBC.

- Sally Balcon warned against the establishment of another layer of bureaucracy, which she felt a town council would inevitably bring. She felt that the Town Forum as it currently stood provided an excellent opportunity for informed debate amongst those interested in the town's future.
- June Bridgeman said that, on the figures just quoted, Royal Tunbridge Wells was under-represented across the Borough as a whole. She sought further information on the 'community governance review' to which Mr Chalmers referred; she added that, before residents could comment on whether they supported the establishment of a town council much more information about its function, benefits and cost would need to be provided.
- Cllr Jukes advised that he had been a parish councillor for 20 years, so he was able to bring some perspective to the discussion. At a Borough level, he stressed how a great deal of effort had gone into reducing bureaucracy and its attendant costs leading, in recent years, to the establishment of the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership; this, he added, focused on partnership working across a number of authorities, leading to joint savings, currently in excess of £5m.

Cllr Jukes advised that he would be meeting the town's MP – newly appointed as Secretary of State for the Department of Communities and Local Government – the next day. One of the main topics of discussion, he added, would be how to achieve a closer link between the management of local councils and the people they served.

Cllr Jukes felt that the establishment of a town council for Tunbridge Wells town would require a significant bureaucracy to support it in its operational services. He added that the existing Town Forum provided an excellent arena for expressing views and sharing matters of concern.

In conclusion, the Chairman, Alastair Tod, thanked all those who had contributed to the debate, adding that he would invite Cllr Mrs Blackburn to come and address the Town Forum at its July meeting.

There were no specific action points at this stage.

8. WORKING GROUPS

The Chairman advised that he had already spoken to a potential Chairman of the new Culture Group the Town Forum had agreed to establish; he hoped the group would be in place before the July meeting.

The Chairman added that more volunteers would be welcome to assist in the operation of the working groups. He encouraged them to make direct contact with the respective chairmen.

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – In the absence of the Chairman, (Michael Holman), Cllr Tracy Moore – who was a member of the working group – provided an

update on some of the key sites as follows: (i) at Five Ways, she advised that the ducting for essential services had been installed but that no firm scheme details for a water feature were yet in place; (ii) on the Pantiles, the water at the Chalybeate Spring was still flowing; (iii) at Union House, Dandara's plans for the site were still awaited; (iv) the upper lake and grotto silt-removal work in Grosvenor and Hilbert Park was due for completion in early June, as part of the HLF-supported enhancement project; (v) at the cinema site, the working group remained optimistic that any new owner of the site might be encouraged to provide a significant water feature; and (vi) in Calverley Grounds, a management plan was beginning to emerge which it was hoped might include a water feature.

Cllr Bob Backhouse reiterated Dandara's intention to provide a water feature at Knight's Wood; he added that he also hoped that a water feature might form part of plans to refresh the square in front of the TN2 centre on Sherwood.

Cllr Jukes advised that he had viewed Berkeley Homes' plans for a water feature within their redevelopment of the former Kent & Sussex Hospital site which he felt would impress Town Forum members once made public.

With the Longfield Road highway improvement scheme, Cllr David Scott was pleased to be able to confirm that conduits for essential water and power services would be in place at the two roundabouts sought by the Water in the Wells Working Group.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – The Chairman, June Bridgeman, focused on two key issues in her working group's update report: (i) how a series of visitor information points might be set up within existing commercial premises across the town; and (ii) the importance of tourist maps with Tunbridge Wells as the central feature, indicating places of interest within a 25-mile radius. A paper explaining the case for a 'Tunbridge Wells centred map' had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Mr Chalmers explained that the existing tourist map – in its hard copy format – had been the subject of a very large print run for the 2015 season, adding that this could be reviewed early in 2016, ready for the following year's tourist season. At that stage, he added, the Economic Development team would take account of the argument now presented for realigning the focus of the map.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Transport Strategy – In the absence of the Acting Chairman, (Jane Fenwick), David Wakefield, who was a member of this working group, provided a verbal summary of the group's current focus. He asked if the July meeting of the Town Forum could consider TWBC's Transportation Strategy. Mr Chalmers advised that the final version of the Strategy was due to be presented to TWBC's Cabinet on 6 August, therefore the timing was right for the Town Forum to consider this topic at its next meeting.

Mr Wakefield also raised the issue of car parking. Mr Chalmers responded by saying that a further report on the outcome of the 'post-payment' trial at the Great Hall car park would be presented to the Planning & Transportation Cabinet Advisory Board on 8 June, before being considered by the Cabinet on 25 June. He added that a link to the Advisory Board agenda would be provided for Town Forum members.

Lorna Blackmore, another member of the working group, was asked to provide a short report on the recent accident at the junction of London Road and Vale Road, where a pedestrian had been seriously injured. Mrs Blackmore explained how this had

highlighted the need to look seriously at implementing a 'no right hand turn' from Vale Road. Mr Chalmers advised that this was an issue which TWBC's Portfolio-holder for Planning and Transportation, Cllr McDermott, could take up as part of his regular meeting with Kent Highways.

Mrs Blackmore also recounted a recent event where visitors were witnessed disembarking from a German tourist coach directly into the traffic flow, at the junction of Mount Pleasant Road and Grove Hill Road. This, she felt, highlighted the need to provide coach drivers with proper information about where passengers could safely disembark.

In response to the on-street parking issues which had been mentioned, Cllr Jukes advised that these points would be taken into account by TWBC as part of its Car Parking Strategy, which had undergone its recent public consultation phase. He stressed the Council's intention to reduce traffic congestion in the town centre as a priority.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the progress report be accepted; and
- (2) That Mike McGeary provide a link to the Planning & Transportation Cabinet Advisory Board agenda item on the 'post-payment' trial results, so that Town Forum members may see what recommendation is being presented to the Cabinet on 25 June.

Planning and Development Strategy – Mark Booker, the Chairman of this working group, reported on other matters which had been considered, beyond the 'Green Network' report above.

Mr Booker advised that the working group would be convening as soon as TWBC formally published its draft Urban Design Framework for public consultation. He added that the group was also looking forward to further discussions with Dandara regarding their plans for the future of Union House.

Finally, Mr Booker drew attention to the fact that TWBC had appointed Kelvin Hinton as the new Planning Policy Manager.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that there was nothing to report to the full Town Forum at this stage.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) 'Love Where We Live' – Cllr Lynne Weatherly drew attention to a leaflet which had been tabled, which explained TWBC's annual 'Love Where We Live' award scheme, designed to recognise people who work hard to improve their communities. She urged Forum members to submit their nominations with as much detail as possible, to enable the judges to make an informed decision.

(b) Mount Ephraim – Mark Booker advised that, before the start of redeveloping the former Kent & Sussex Hospital site, his local residents' association had proposed the provision of a small 'pay and display' car park as part of the proposals, which would include an improved right turning lane, heading south-west to join Mount Ephraim. While the car park suggestion had not found favour, he asked whether an improved

turning lane could still be considered. Cllr Jukes indicated that a 'left hand turn only' option at the end of Mount Ephraim was a proposal which could be considered.

(c) '20 is Plenty' road safety initiative – Adrian Berendt invited questions about the '20 is plenty' road safety campaign, of which he was a leading member. Marguerita Morton indicated that she would welcome such a scheme in St John's Road.

Related to this issue, Cllr Backhouse advised members that Cllr Bill Hills had now taken on the road safety role at TWBC, formerly led by ex-Cllr Caroline Derrick.

(d) Cultural and Learning Hub – Cllr Jane March thanked the Forum members for their letter of support for the Cultural and Learning Hub, as part of TWBC's bid for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. She added that a decision on the Council's application would be known by the end of July.

Cllr Backhouse asked when it was hoped a more appropriate name might emerge for the Hub. Cllr March acknowledged that 'Cultural and Learning Hub' was not a particularly appealing name but added that, at this stage, it was a well-understood 'working' title. She confirmed that a more relevant name for the Hub – if it is to proceed – will certainly be agreed in due course.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 16 July 2015 at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 8pm.