



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 22 January 2015

Attended: Cllr Bob Backhouse, David Barnett, Cllr Ronen Basu, Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, Cllr Peter Bulman, David Bushell, Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold, Adrian Cory, Jane Fenwick, Allan Gooda, Alex Green, Tim Harper, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Kyrios Kyriacou, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Cllr David Neve, Peter Perry (sub), Nick Pope, Cllr Catherine Rankin, Cllr David Scott, Kate Sergeant (sub), Anne Stobo, Alastair Tod (Chairman), David Wakefield (sub), Denise Watts, Cllr Lynne Weatherly, Philip Whitbourn (sub) and Cllr Chris Woodward

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Democratic and Community Engagement Manager), Jean Marshall (Planning Policy Manager), Debra Thackeray (Support Officer, Executive Directorate) and Mike McGear (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Cllr David Jukes (Leader of the Council), John Barber (Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons), Cllrs Paul Barrington-King (TWBC Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Sustainability), Cllr Bill Hills (Vice-Chairman of TWBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee), Brian Lippard (RTW Civic Society), Mrs Tracy Moore, Tony Pawson (Warwick Park Residents' Association) and Cllr Mike Rusbridge (TWBC Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Finance and Governance)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Sally Balcon, Cllr Ben Chapelard, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Will Farmer, Sue Kaner, Bill Kern, Altan Omer, Angela Phillips, Cllr Don Sloan, Mary Wardrop, Victor Webb, Cllr Frank Williams and Pat Wilson.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting dated 27 November 2014, were presented for noting and the minutes of the ordinary meeting held that same evening were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 27 November 2014 be noted; and
- (2) That the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 27 November 2014 be approved.

3. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

27 November 2014

- 4 Tunbridge Wells Car Club

Transport Strategy WG The working group be asked to consider the Tunbridge Wells Car Club initiative in detail and report their findings to the full Town Forum.

Jane Fenwick, Acting Chairman of the Transport Strategy Working Group, advised that the Tunbridge Wells Car Club had enjoyed quite a successful start. She asked Town Forum members if they had any suggestions for further locations within the town, including any residential 'bases'. It was agreed that Mike McGeary would send an all-Forum e-mail, seeking any additional proposals.

Action point: Mike McGeary to contact all Town Forum members.

4 Purchase of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons

While there was no specific action required from the November meeting, John Barber, Chairman of the Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons, provided an update on the current position regarding the possible purchase of the Commons from the current owner, Targetfollow. He also sought the Town Forum's support in the initiative by the Friends' group to call upon KCC to implement a number of crossing points, to provide easier and safer access to the Commons.

Mr Barber explained how Targetfollow had deliberately triggered the six-month moratorium element of the 'community right to bid' process, through their statement that they intended to offer the Commons for sale. He added that, from detailed discussions with the Chief Executive of Targetfollow, it had become clear that the company was keen to maximise the value of the Commons before their eventual disposal, as well as secure an income stream through (i) charging for existing encroachment and (ii) install a significantly enlarged car park.

Mr Barber advised that a special panel debate had been organised by the Civic Society on Thursday 12 February at the Town Hall, which all interested parties could attend, to hear more detail and, if in agreement, to register their concern at how the Commons are being managed by Targetfollow. He sought the Town Forum's support in this initiative.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Town Forum indicates its support for the Friends of the Commons' plea to KCC to provide a number of safe crossing points to the Commons, through writing to the County Council in advance of the Joint Transportation Board meeting on 20 April; and
- (2) That the Town Forum supports the Friends of the Commons in its efforts to preserve the integrity of the Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons and urges all interested parties to attend the panel debate on 12 February and, if in agreement, to register their concern at how the Commons are currently managed.

4 Open Spaces Strategy

Adam Chalmers To report back on when it was expected that TWBC's Open Spaces Strategy would be reviewed.

Mr Chalmers advised that this document would be reviewed in 2016, as part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy Review.

4. UPDATE REPORT FROM LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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

- (a) **Aircraft noise** – Cllr Jukes welcomed the fact that Joe Ratcliffe, KCC's Principal Transport Planner, was making a presentation to the Forum that same evening on the current consultation on a possible second runway at Gatwick Airport. He added that West Sussex County Council had voted against the proposal and that East Sussex County Council were moving towards the same opinion;
- (b) **Ice rink** – Cllr Jukes was pleased to be able to report that over 36,000 people had used the ice rink over the 2014/15 period;
- (c) **Union House** – The Leader of the Council advised that Union House was now in the ownership of Dandara, with whom the Borough Council had a good working relationship, he added. He advised that Dandara had given an assurance that the existing building would be demolished, adding that they would be holding a public discussion on the future of the site on 27 January, to which all interested parties were invited;
- (d) **Cultural and Learning Hub** – Cllr Jukes advised that progress with the early-stage planning of this initiative remained on track. He added that it was still intended to submit a stage I bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in April;
- (e) **Bayham Road football pitches** – Cllr Jukes referred to the issues raised by Foresters Football Club and their criticism of the condition of the pitches at Bayham Road. He advised that he had discussed this matter direct with the football club and had also talked to the Football Association who had become involved. Cllr Jukes said that TWBC had initiated a survey of the pitches by the Institute of Groundsmen, who had drawn attention to the fact that the site was never intended to be used for sports pitches. An improvement schedule was now in place, Cllr Jukes advised, with the situation being closely monitored;
- (f) **New newspaper** – Cllr Jukes advised that a new weekly free newspaper was being launched in the town, called the Times of Tunbridge Wells, published by Markerstudy;
- (g) **Chalybeate Spring** – At the Chairman's prompting, the Leader of the Council advised that, while there had been a resumption of the water flow at the Chalybeate Spring, it had proved to be temporary. Michael Holman asked whether the same approach as was being adopted at Grosvenor and Hilbert Park – where water was to be pumped into the dripping wells – could be followed at the Chalybeate Spring. Cllr Jukes felt that this remained a possibility.

There were no action points arising from this report.

5. GATWICK AIRPORT – CONSULTATION ON A POSSIBLE SECOND RUNWAY

Joe Ratcliffe, KCC's Principal Transport Planner, was welcomed to the meeting. He provided the Town Forum members with an informative presentation, covering: the growth in air traffic at Gatwick since 2010; the approach routes followed; night-time flights; and the second runway proposal.

Mr Ratcliffe advised that, based upon the detailed evidence KCC had obtained, the County Council would be formalising its opposition to the second runway proposal. He added that it was not expected that a formal decision would be made by the Airports Commission until after the Parliamentary election in May.

Members of the Town Forum raised the following issues with Mr Ratcliffe:

- Cllr Rankin sought confirmation that it was Gatwick Airport's agreed policy to reduce the number of flights over larger residential areas. Mr Ratcliffe confirmed that it was Gatwick's policy to reduce flights over urban areas, adding that it was also their policy to concentrate flight paths on those areas that were not densely populated, as this reflected government guidance. Mr Ratcliffe added that government guidelines stated that the operators should reduce the number of flights over 'areas of outstanding natural beauty' at a height of less than 7,000 feet;
- Tony Pawson asked whether KCC had analysed the householder compensatory aspects of a second runway. He felt that the numbers in terms of the economic benefit to West Kent were too small. Mr Ratcliffe explained that none of the measures being considered (e.g. a contribution of £1,000 towards council tax costs) applied to residents in Kent. Mr Ratcliffe advised that the housing numbers referred to in the consultation documentation were for post-2030, adding that most local authority local plans did not project that far at this stage;
- Jane Fenwick asked what would happen after the close of the consultation period (3 February) and whether there would be any effort to address the night-flight equalisation issue. Mr Ratcliffe advised that, at the end of the consultation period, the results would be analysed and that the Commission was expected to report in the Summer.

Mr Ratcliffe advised that the other issues which surrounded Gatwick's operations would need to be addressed by 2020. He added that the current number of night-time flights was set until 2017. If Gatwick so determined, they might offer to reduce the number of night-time flights, he advised;

- Michael Holman asked whether the Town Forum members should be asked whether or not they supported the Borough Council's formal position – agreed at its special meeting held on 7 January – of opposing any further expansion of Gatwick Airport. The Chairman, Alastair Tod, agreed that this should be put to the vote at the end of the debate;
- Cllr Ronen Basu asked whether a full impact study had been undertaken on the issue of air pollution, should a second runway be built. He added that many residents locally were supportive of the hub airport proposal. Mr Ratcliffe advised that an air pollution impact study had indeed been undertaken but that this was based on the likely effect much closer to the airport itself.

On the issue of a hub airport, Mr Ratcliffe advised that one centred on Heathrow would be much more costly than at Gatwick, adding however that the economic benefits which Heathrow would enjoy would be much greater. If a new hub airport were being seriously considered, Mr Ratcliffe advised, there would be a great deal of opposition, as witnessed by the Thames estuary proposal. Cllr Rankin reminded the group that the Thames estuary proposal would not achieve any reduction in the number of flights at Gatwick.

In conclusion, Mr Ratcliffe was thanked for his very informative and interesting presentation and the following resolution was agreed.

RESOLVED - That the following decision made by the Borough Council be unanimously endorsed: "That this Council is opposed to any further expansion of

Gatwick Airport and the increased concentration of flight paths, and supports a significant reduction in the number of night flights”.

6. SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

Jean Marshall, TWBC's Planning Policy Manager, advised Town Forum members that the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) had reached its pre-submission stage. She added that there was now a period of formal public consultation about to begin, lasting from 9 February until 23 March; after that, the document would be forwarded to the Secretary of State and a formal 'examination in public' by a Government-appointed inspector (likely to be held this Autumn) would follow.

Mrs Marshall stressed that the public consultation at this stage was focused on whether the document was both 'sound' and in compliance with national planning policy.

Mrs Marshall provided some further context, with a look ahead at the consequences of national government planning policy: she explained how the Borough Council's Core Strategy had been adopted in 2010, which pre-dated the Government's introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This meant that, just as with many other local authorities, Tunbridge Wells had an adopted Core Strategy which was not in compliance with the NPPF. Last summer, Mrs Marshall advised, it became acceptable to adopt a two-stage approach, i.e. to continue with the Site Allocations DPD process, but to start to prepare for a review of the Core Strategy. In other words, Mrs Marshall added, the Site Allocations DPD was stage one towards meeting the Government's current targets, within the 6,000 new homes which the Core Strategy specified, up to 2026.

Mrs Marshall advised that Town Forum representatives had been invited to a number of public exhibitions and workshops taking place throughout February, in order to learn more about the Site Allocations DPD pre-submission document and process.

Members of the Town Forum were then invited to comment on the Site Allocations DPD pre-submission process and on the Core Strategy review, which would begin in the Autumn.

- Lorna Blackmore asked why Tunbridge Wells town had to take a higher allocation of housing than other parts of the Borough. Mrs Marshall advised that it had been agreed in the 2010 Core Strategy that 75% of the Borough's total additional housing allocation would have to be taken by the town, including Southborough. She advised that this was essentially because of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Green Belt status of the vast majority of the remainder of the Tunbridge Wells Borough, which provided a high degree of protection from large-scale development;
- Stephen Bowser asked how many additional homes were required across the town. Mrs Marshall advised that, at this stage, i.e. under the existing Core Strategy, 6,000 new homes would be required in the Borough, up to 2026. She added that, as part of the review of the Core Strategy, that number was likely to increase;
- Jane Fenwick asked whether the Government inspector would take traffic congestion into account when the Site Allocations DPD underwent its examination in public. Mrs Marshall advised that, technically, this element would have been taken into account when the Core Strategy numbers were agreed, based upon the available infrastructure;

- Stephen Bowser asked whether there was any Boundary Commission aspect which would impact upon the Site Allocations DPD at this point. Adam Chalmers, Democratic and Community Engagement Manager, advised that this was a totally separate matter, adding that KCC had called for an electoral review for the county, which would be subject to formal public consultation. Mr Chalmers added that there were no particular issues of concern for this Borough;
- Cllr Catherine Rankin invited Mrs Marshall to say how Hawkhurst Parish managed to have one of its allocated sites removed from the pre-submission Site Allocations document. Mrs Marshall explained that it had not been an officer recommendation to remove one of the sites, but a full Council decision, based upon the representations made by interested groups and individuals in Hawkhurst, where the Parish Council had set out an alternative route for the Parish to achieve its overall total. Mrs Marshall added two notes of caution: first, she advised that the Government inspector would determine whether the locally-made suggestion was acceptable; secondly, Mrs Marshall advised that the originally proposed site in Hawkhurst – a greenfield site – was now the subject of a planning appeal against refusal for housing development;
- Michael Holman sought clarification over why there appeared to be a recommended change of use for Camden Square within the latest version of the Site Allocations DPD. It was agreed that Mr Holman would make written contact with Mrs Marshall about the specific detail;
- Mark Booker referred to the full Council decision made on 10 December, where all reference to a review of the Green Belt had been removed from the pre-submission Site Allocations DPD. He asked if there was any way in which the Town Forum could formally support such a proposal. Mrs Marshall advised that that decision had been incorporated into the DPD, as well as the remaining three safeguarded sites, which were designed for future growth, which would enable the housing numbers to be achieved without going into the Green Belt. However, Mrs Marshall advised that the Green Belt would have to feature in further reviews.

Mrs Marshall next focused on what work the Planning Policy team would address, beyond the Site Allocations DPD stage. She advised that the evidence base work was beginning, starting with the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), jointly with Sevenoaks District Council, looking at future housing needs for the period 2013-2033. Mrs Marshall added that there was a statutory requirement to establish what the 'objectively-assessed need' was for the Borough, based upon population forecasts, the latest of which were due for publication the following month.

To provide some context, Mrs Marshall added that, under the existing projected population figures, it was felt that a further 10,290 homes would be required in the Borough up to 2033, equating to an annual figure of 515. Based upon whatever will be determined as the starting point (once the new population forecasts were published), Mrs Marshall advised that local planning authorities were able to consider legitimate obstacles to achieving that target, such as Green Belt and other designations, which would help in the presentation of a robust case to a subsequent Government inspector. Thus Mrs Marshall was able to advise the Town Forum members that they should not be frightened or intimidated by whatever starting point was presented, under the next stage of the plan-making process. The Borough, she added, would have to accommodate a certain level of housing growth, but there were significant mitigating factors, she felt.

Cllr Rankin thanked Mrs Marshall for her very informative presentation. She remained, however, concerned with the exponential growth in housing numbers which the town area would have to accommodate, in comparison with the other parts of the Borough. Cllr Rankin felt that one consequence of growth at this rate might be a town that was no longer sustainable.

Mrs Marshall advised that the existing growth distribution (75% for the town area) had been agreed in 2010 with the adoption of the Core Strategy, the review of which would begin in the Autumn. At that stage, she added, it was open for the Borough Council to determine that some rural areas could accommodate growth. The evidence-based work which would help shape that balance was what would be taking place over the coming two years, it was noted.

As part of the next stage, Mrs Marshall added that the Government might proceed with its 'new towns' initiative (e.g. Ebbsfleet) which might have a beneficial effect on the target for Tunbridge Wells. At the end of the day, she added, the town was constrained by national planning policy.

- Jane Fenwick pursued the issue of the distribution of new homes in the town area: would it, she asked, follow the pattern established by existing population growth or would it be the subject of a change in approach within the town area. Mrs Marshall explained that the existing Core Strategy provided for all new development to be a mix of house sizes. In rural areas, she added, there was less of a demand for apartments, thus the range of house types depended upon the locality.

Mrs Marshall went on to say that, with future growth figures – and conscious of the constraints within which the Borough operated – it might be necessary to look at existing Green Belt land; however, she added that there might be a number of small pockets of land which would accommodate small-scale development, thus removing the pressure to consider Green Belt land.

Within the town area, Mrs Marshall advised that the next review might see multi-level new development as an acceptable way of achieving a higher housing target.

Mrs Fenwick asked whether sub-division of some of the existing housing stock could be viewed as part of the solution. However, Mrs Marshall felt that the positive impact of this approach would be very small. She thought it might be more productive to examine opportunities to convert some existing spaces over shops for housing use.

- Alex Green enquired about the likely timetable for the Core Strategy review. Mrs Marshall advised that the timeline the authority would be working to was set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme. That stated that the review of the Core Strategy would begin this Autumn, leading to a likely public consultation stage taking place in the Winter of 2016. Implementation of a revised Core Strategy was, therefore, post-2017, it was noted;
- Tony Pawson raised a number of issues: (i) was there, he asked, a natural resistance to change local government boundaries, which might have an impact on planning policy; (ii) he felt that assumptions about rural areas and their infrastructure might need to be 'health-checked'; and (iii) was it possible, he asked, to change the basis of some of the existing Core Strategy. Mrs Marshall advised that, crucially, a review of the Core Strategy allowed a completely fresh look at its content, thus any previous assumptions could be

re-visited. Some sites would, however, be taken forward into the new, single, allocations development plan, Mrs Marshall advised. Any village being looked at must have the required infrastructure (including public transport links, shops, etc) to support growth, Mrs Marshall added.

Mrs Marshall was thanked for her very helpful and informative presentation. There were no specific action points arising from this report.

7. RESPONSES TO TWBC CONSULTATION ISSUES

David Wakefield, Chairman of the Finance and Other Issues Working Group, presented a draft response which his group had put together, on the following two formal TWBC consultation topics: (a) the draft TWBC budget for 2015/16; and (b) the draft political priorities 2015/16.

Mr Wakefield's draft response had been circulated to the Forum members ahead of the meeting. He sought approval to submit this to TWBC as the formal Town Forum response. However, due to the lateness of the hour, the Chairman suggested that those members who wished to add/change any elements of the draft response should make direct contact with Mr Wakefield, within the following 48 hours.

Cllr Peter Bulman voiced his opposition to the proposal to encourage TWBC to increase their car parking charges. Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold was also not in favour of the proposal to charge for replacement wheelie bins, especially as she felt that many such replacements were as a result of theft. She also felt that the reference to the use of S.106 monies should be deferred, pending further details about this complex issue, which the Head of Planning Services might provide.

Jane Fenwick, Acting Chairman of the Transport Strategy Working Group, advised that her group would shortly be examining TWBC's draft Parking Strategy, adding that a draft response to that would be circulated to Town Forum members as quickly as possible.

8. PRESENTATION BY CLLR SCOTT ON ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

Cllr David Scott gave a presentation to the Town Forum on how he felt the problems of the town's congestion might be alleviated. After much research, he had decided to focus on existing and proven technology, basing his proposal on an ULTra driverless pod system, as currently in use at Terminal 5 at Heathrow Airport.

Cllr Scott felt that the ideal initial location for such a system was the Pembury Road route into town, with loops to the Hospital and other locations.

- Denise Watts wondered how effective the proposal would be during the peak 'rush hour' periods of the day. Cllr Scott felt that, if the proposed system were single-line, this could double the capacity along that route. He added that he envisaged this working in conjunction with a park and ride system at Tesco in Pembury;
- Stephen Bowser enquired how the required car parking capacity could be met. Cllr Scott advised that his proposal assumed car park space for 320 vehicles. If more were needed, he added, then there was capacity at linked locations for this;

- Stephen Bowser asked whether Public Works Loans Board funding might be appropriate for this scheme. Cllr Scott advised that this was just one possible source amongst a number of others, which were being investigated.

In summing up, the Chairman sought the Town Forum's views on whether the draft motion, set out in the agenda papers, should be supported. (For clarification, Cllr Scott advised that this was just the first paragraph on page 27; the remainder of that page, he advised, was intended to provide clarification.)

RESOLVED – The Town Forum encourages Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Kent County Council to carry out an assessment of driverless or other innovative transport systems for Tunbridge Wells as a means of easing the impact of traffic congestion on Tunbridge Wells.

9. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – The Chairman, Michael Holman, had circulated an update paper with the agenda, covering a number of general issues as well as his usual site-specific report. Bearing in mind the time pressures at the meeting, he left Town Forum members to read the paper at their leisure and to ask him any specific questions in between meetings, if they so wished.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – In the absence of the Chairman of this working group, one of its members - Dorothea Holman - made a brief verbal report. She referred to a mis-quote by the Kent & Sussex Courier over the work the group had been undertaking in respect of TWBC's re-freshed tourism website. She said that she had not been critical of TWBC's initiative, adding that she and her group colleagues had been very grateful for the Town Forum member feedback provided to date. Mrs Holman added that issues raised had already been corrected and that this work was continuing. She invited Forum members to submit any further comments they wished to, as soon as possible.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Transport Strategy – Jane Fenwick, acting Chairman of this working group, drew attention to an update report she had provided on the recent work of her fellow group members, set out on page 31 of the agenda.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Planning and Development Strategy – Mark Booker, the recently-appointed Chairman of this working group, drew members' attention to the summary of its recent work, set out on page 33.

Philip Whitbourn, who was leading on the Site Allocations element of the working group's remit, summarised their approach to the forthcoming public consultation stage. Dr Whitbourn's paper, set out on page 35, listed the key points which he and his ad-hoc group would use as a basis for their proposed draft response, to be submitted to TWBC by the deadline of 23 March.

Dr Whitbourn also drew attention to the fact that, on 26 January, TWBC's Planning & Transportation Cabinet Advisory Board would be considering a draft Urban Design Framework Supplementary Planning Document, before its release for formal public

consultation. He felt that its significance was that it covered much that the previous Tunbridge Wells Town Plan group (under the chairmanship of the former Leader of the Council, Bob Atwood) had already studied.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Working groups – The Chairman advised that, following his review of the Town Forum's working groups – undertaken in consultation with all their chairmen – it had been decided that he would like to add to their number, with the formation of one tasked with the remit of 'culture'. He said that further details would be provided later but, in the meantime, he asked for volunteers who would like to sit on this working group to make direct contact with him.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 26 March 2015 at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 9pm.