



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 22 April 2010

1. Present:

Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association), Maggie Fraser (Tunbridge Wells Over Fifties' Forum), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association), Peter Perry (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Users' Association), Christopher Thomas (The Chairman of the Town Forum and The Goodwins No's 1 & 2 Residents' Company/Woodbury Close Residents' Association), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association and Chair of Sherborne Close) and Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association).

RTW Ward Councillors: Peter Crawford (Vice-Chairman and Broadwater), Mrs Catherine Mayhew (Park), Frank Williams (Sherwood) and Chris Woodward (St John's).

Others in attendance: Roy Bullock (Leader of the Council), Mary Harris (Courier Newspaper) and Samantha Timms (Senior Committee Administrator).

2. Apologies:

Mary Burgess (Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School), Betsey Dix (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Gill Field (Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School); George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Simon Smith (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Alastair Tod (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society) and David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association).

(Christopher Thomas in the Chair for the duration of the meeting.)

3. Membership Changes

New members – Sherwood area would now be represented by Zoe Jangaard, Trustee of TN2 and Alison Baker.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 25 March 2010

The minutes were agreed, subject to the following amendments:

Amendment to minute 9 'Any Other Business', Concessionary Fares, first paragraph to read:

"John Goodfellow informed members that concessionary fares were stated to be costing Tunbridge Wells Borough Council £1.3m in this financial year (2009/2010). The bus companies were hardly making any money, and could withdraw services. The Town Forum agreed there should be further investigation."

Amendment to minute 9 'Any Other Business', Adequate Parking Provision at the New Pembury Hospital, paragraph 4

After "at hospitals;" insert "this income loss would seriously reduce prospects for any needed parking improvements, so"

Matters Arising: None.

5. Actions from Previous Meetings

On-going Action

That all representatives from **any association/member to provide details of activities** that they had undertaken and/or want to promote to Daniel Bech in order for them to be included on the Town Forum's website so that all members could know what was happening. This is particularly important so as to avoid duplication of activity and to show a single voice for Councillors to deal with.

The Chairman, Christopher Thomas, reiterated the fact that if any association/member wishes other Town Forum members to be aware of their organisation's activities, they need to inform Daniel Bech in order for them to be included on the Town Forum's website. All representatives are reminded to inform the Town Forum of concerns held by residents, who may not be represented on the Town Forum, but wish for a platform to raise such concerns.

Actions Outstanding from the Meeting dated 26 November 2009

- 4.1 Graham Goddard to contact the Ambulance Service for clarification on their reorganisation proposals for a 'make ready' centre.
- 4.3 Graham Goddard to seek clarification from Kent & Medway Social Care Trust on whether in-patient services are/will be provided from Maidstone.
- 4.6 Graham Goddard to look to provide a 'who does what' chart on their website which could also be sent to the Town Forum for publication.

Samantha Timms informed members that she was in regular contact with Graham Goddard who was chasing up on the actions.

Actions Outstanding from the Meeting dated 28 January 2010

- 9.1 Councillor Crawford to contact the Town and Country Housing Group regarding wheel clamping and inform Mr Sharma of the response.

Update dated 25 February - Councillor Crawford gave an update to the Town Forum and stated that this was an on-going action which would be resolved in due course. The signage regarding wheel clamping in the Ramslye area was not adequate and needed to be looked into further.

Actions from the Meeting dated 25 March 2010 – There were no actions set at the 25 March 2010 meeting.

6. Reports from Borough Councillors

Councillor Crawford – Members were informed that a meeting had taken place regarding Ropers Gate and the issue of empty premises/shops was discussed. He stated that when the vacant premises were being developed, it was important that the Post Office had to remain open. Maggie Fraser stated that the meeting was very productive and useful with some positive ideas coming forward. The Town Forum was informed that the Town and Country Housing Group and the Borough Council were currently looking at alternative developments/uses for the empty premises.

7. Reports from Champions/Vision Committee

Transport Update – There was no update given.

Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom - Daniel Bech provided the Town Forum with an update on Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom. He stated that it was ongoing and that an opportunity had arisen to obtain some flower tubs for The Pantiles. 'Small Loads' a company in Paddock Wood had donated four of them.

Daniel suggested that it would be wonderful if everyone from the Town Forum donated money in order that the Town Forum could have their own flower tub display. A donation of £10 from each member was felt appropriate. Targetfollow was sponsoring the Schools' Award ceremony at the Pantiles and the Salomons was sponsoring the general Awards ceremony which would include Best street, Best basket or Best front garden.

Members were informed that businesses were now taking an interest and responses were being received. Discussions with Friends of Dunorlan Park and the Commons' Tenants and the Friends of the Commons were still taking place to seek donations.

Town Hall and civic complex – Daniel Bech, on behalf of George Lawson, informed members that there was great concern over the relocation of the administrative functions of the Council and the selling of the Town Hall and other civic buildings (Assembly Hall, Police Station, Library and Museum) and the Adult Education Centre. The predicted cost would be a great deal more than the sale of the Town Hall and civic complex.

From the civic and cultural points of view, it would be a disaster and no thought had been given to the loss of the only large hall within the town centre. The Town Hall was a focal point of the town and was an object of civic pride. If the Town Hall became empty, it would, in time, become yet another 'grot spot' within the town.

Daniel went on to say that, although the Leader of the Council had stated in the past that consultation would take place with regard to the selling of the complex, it would also be important to seek responses on the Feasibility Study. The questions raised here by George were, who compiled the Feasibility Study and at what cost? The time for action was now rather than later when it would be too late.

The Town Forum, upon hearing this, agreed that the Chairman of the Town Forum, Christopher Thomas, should liaise with the Council's Chief Executive and the Chairman of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company, to seek clarification on the Company's suggested proposals and to obtain a copy of the Feasibility Study that has been compiled.

Members also agreed that the 24 June 2010 meeting of the Town Forum should be dedicated to the Relocation / Selling of the Town Hall and Civic Buildings. Other organisations should be invited to attend this meeting together with all town centre councillors. Kent County Council would also need to be invited to attend in order that the Town Forum could hear their opinion(s) as the Library, Museum and Adult Education Centre were the responsibility of the County.

The Town Forum stated that this decision, which would affect the whole of the town, should not be a decision made by six Cabinet councillors, but by the wider community. Jane Fenwick stated that an 'online petition' would be a good source to obtaining the town centre's views.

Members of the Town Forum suggested that the democratic functions and social meetings should still remain in the Town Hall, whilst the administrative function could be relocated elsewhere. The remaining office space, by way of example, could be leased to other organisations.

Councillor Woodward arrived at the meeting near the end of the discussion of this item and informed members that the overall picture would need to be looked at; no decisions had yet been made or proposals put forward, just ideas. Consultation would be carried out with options that would be viable.

George Lawson's full statement is appended to these minutes for members' information.

Local Development Framework / Core Strategy – Phillip Whitbourn reflected on the Core Strategy and affordable housing. Phillip said that the Inspector found the Core Strategy was minimally sound.

See <http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/corestrategy>

AGREED: That the 24 June 2010 Town Forum meeting be dedicated to the selling of the Town Hall and civic building/relocation and that other organisations and all town centre councillors attend this meeting.

ACTION:

7.1 That the Chairman of the Town Forum liaise with the Council's Chief Executive and the Chairman of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company to seek clarification on the Company's suggested proposals and to obtain a copy of the Feasibility Study that has been compiled.

8. Tunbridge Wells and the West Kent Economy

Councillor Woodward gave a presentation (see Appendix B to these minutes) to the Town Forum and outlined the background to the Tunbridge Wells and the West Kent Economy Review Report (see Appendix C to these minutes). The Council's Local Economy and Housing Select Committee Working Group had conducted a review into the Tunbridge Wells and West Kent economies, originally formed to investigate the opportunities for obtaining funding for initiatives from the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA). However, it had become clear as the review progressed, that SEEDA would not be in a position to provide future funding and so the review was refocused to examine the West Kent Partnership and the areas of potential growth for the Tunbridge Wells economy.

Officers from Tunbridge Wells Borough and Kent County, SEEDA and the Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services were interviewed. The Group found that external witnesses were unanimous on two points. The first was that the Borough Council should seek to integrate itself further into the West Kent Partnership as the vast majority of interaction between SEEDA, Kent County Council and districts took place through the Partnership at sub-regional level. The second was that there were three key sectors with the potential for growth in the borough: the health, creative and higher education sectors.

Councillor Woodward then outlined the conclusions of the review. He stated that the Council's Cabinet would be asked to approve the recommendations in the review report on 29 April 2010. The review had also been sent to Business Link, Kent County Council, Sevenoaks District Council, The South East England Development Agency, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and the West Kent Partnership, to seek responses to the recommendations made.

John Cunningham expressed concern that the report was non-specific. Tourism was not mentioned, particularly night tourism. Councillor Bullock stated that international tourists tend to stay in and around London and the South coast. European tourists tend to come to Royal Tunbridge Wells for day trips rather than for over-night stays. Although the day tourists were beneficial, it was felt by the Town Forum that more attractions need to be advertised to encourage over-night tourism.

Christopher Thomas also stated that there was no university in the Borough; what was the vision for education? Councillor Woodward explained that he was unable to answer that question at present.

Councillor Bullock informed members that a meeting had taken place with Adult Education and a Church-led school on how to form a life-long learning hub in the area; this group would meet again in the future.

Environmental issues were raised. Councillor Bullock stated that the Council was trying to reduce its carbon footprint and was 'thinking green' on a day-to-day basis. The Town and Country Housing Group had established a policy in relation to environmental issues. The Council was pro-active on environmental issues.

Jane Fenwick asked whether the Council was concerned about older buildings and their compliance with the new regulations that were forthcoming. Councillor Bullock confirmed that all new builds would be compliant.

The Town Forum thanked Councillor Woodward for his presentation and stated that they would look forward to working with him in the future relating to this review.

9. Any Other Business – None

10. Dates of next meetings of the Town Forum

2010

- 27 May 2010 at 6.30pm
 - Graham Goddard, Hospital Development Dir., Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust
 - Rob Patterson from Arriva
- 24 June 2010 at 6.30pm – Town Hall and Civic Complex
- 29 July 2010 at 6.30pm
- 30 September 2010 at 6.30pm
- 28 October 2010 at 6.30pm
- 25 November 2010 at 6.30pm
- 16 December 2010 meeting – provisional,
there is a possibility of holding this meeting in a different venue and at a different time.

2011

- 27 January 2011 at 6.30pm
- 24 February 2011 at 6.30pm
- 31 March 2011 at 6.30pm
- 28 April 2011 at 6.30pm
- 26 May 2011 at 6.30pm
- 30 June 2011 at 6.30pm
- 28 July 2011 at 6.30pm
- August – no meeting
- 29 September 2011 at 6.30pm
- 27 October 2011 at 6.30pm
- 24 November 2011 at 6.30pm
- 15 December 2011 at 6.30pm

27 May 2010 is the next full Town Forum

- Any reports/short papers to be emailed/posted to Samantha Timms by no later than 10am on Tuesday 11 May 2010.

(NOTE:

- (1) Item 6 had been taken out of sequence from the agenda; the order of reports taken was 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 5. After item 5, the meeting then followed the order of reports as set out on the agenda;
- (2) Councillor Woodward arrived at the meeting during minute 7 (7.10pm). Councillors Bullock, Mrs Mayhew and Williams arrived at the meeting during minute 8 (7.29pm); and
- (3) The meeting closed at 8.16pm.
The next meeting of the Town Forum will be held on Thursday 27 May 2010.

Statement from George Lawson

regarding the closure of the Town Hall and the Civic Complex

“I was more than a little concerned at the proposal of the TWBC to sell off the Town Hall and civic complex (Assembly Hall, Police Station, Library and Museum) together with the KCC Adult Education Centre and relocate the administrative functions of the Council in the Land Registry Building. If the recent report in the Courier (2 April 2010) is correct the proposal does not make financial sense. The predicted cost is a great deal more than the sale of the Town Hall complex was expected to raise. It is hard to believe that the large area occupied by the Town Hall complex is worth so little.

From the civic and cultural points of view it would be a disaster. The Mayor has confirmed that there is no provision for replacing the Assembly Hall or the Adult Education Centre. No thought seems to have been given to the damage that the loss of our only large hall would do to the cultural life of the Town. It is the only venue available to the Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra, The Tunbridge Wells Choral Society, the TWODs (Tunbridge Wells Operatic and Dramatic Society), the Dance Festival, and The International Young Concert Artists Final, not to mention the many other professional entertainments that currently use the hall. Not very long ago a substantial sum was spent on refurbishing the Assembly Hall – is this all going to be sacrificed? There is also the matter of the future of the Museum and Library – where will these indispensable facilities go? I suspect that in the present financial climate they will get short shrift! There is also the question of the War Memorial - this will be a very sensitive matter.

I would add that I am not alone in questioning the proposal to redevelop the present Town Hall complex and relocate the administrative functions away from the centre of the Town. I have recently been approached by a number of concerned citizens, fearful of the damage that the demise of the Assembly Hall and Adult Education Centre will do to the amenities and cultural life of Tunbridge Wells. At the last (Civic) Symphony Concert of the season on 11th April, 2010 the Mayor made it quite clear that he shares our fears.

In most towns of any importance the Town Hall is the focal point of the town and an object of civic pride. If this proposed scheme is implemented it will confirm my worst fear that the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has no real interest in the town centre.

I realise that the Leader of the Council will say that nothing is set in stone and that there will be consultation when the feasibility study is completed. I also know from past experience that by that time it will not matter what the Council Tax Payers think – it will be too late to change anything. The time for action is now – the Citizens of this Borough are entitled to know exactly what is being proposed, what is the case for such a drastic course of action, who is carrying out the feasibility study and what brief have they been given and how much it is all costing. Finally the Council tax payers need to be asked what they think of the idea NOW, not when it is too late to change anything.

In the 43 years I have lived in Tunbridge Wells I have observed, what in 1967, was an attractive well-kept Royal Borough steadily decline to the point of being a shabby, poorly maintained and ill served Borough devoid of all civic pride. In short - a shadow of its former self! I think it is time to stop the rot and if the Town Forum is worth anything at all it should take the lead in this matter.”

George Lawson