

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Thursday, 22 November 2018

Present: Caroline Auckland (Soroptomist International of Tunbridge Wells and District), Sally Balcon (Friends of the Commons), Adrian Berendt (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group), Mark Booker (Culverden Resident's Association), Stephen Bowser (Residents First), Councillor Ben Chapelard, Councillor Mrs Barbara Cobbold, John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Sue Diales (Calverley Park Gardens Residents Association), Rebecca Dodsworth (Friends of Calverley Grounds), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Residents' Association), Margeret Ginman (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery), Alex Green (Trinity Theatre), Tim Harper (Camden Park Residents' Association), Councillor Lawrence Heasman, Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents' Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), Dean Kenward (Hawkenbury Village Association), Kyrios Kyriacou (Kingswood Residents' Association), Paul Mason (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group), Helen Mitcham (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Museum, Library and Art Gallery), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Land Association), Councillor David Scott, Veronika Segall-Jones (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Tim Tempest (Friends of the Grove), Alastair Tod (Poonah Road Resident's Association), Adrian Twinner (Tunbridge Wells U3A) and David Wakefield (Inner London Road Residents' Association)

Officers in Attendance: David Candlin, Head of Economic Development and Property;

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1 Apologies were received from Brian Lippard (RTW Civic Society), David Bushell (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery) and Borough Councillor David Scott.

VOTING ENTITLEMENT FOR MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

- 2 The Scrutiny and Engagement Officer had circulated a list of organisations and borough council ward members which had achieved the required level of attendance at meetings to be able to vote at the AGM, as determined by the Town Forum's Constitution.

MINUTES OF THE 2017 AGM

- 3 The minutes of the 2017 AGM, held on 16 November 2017, were submitted. It was noted that these had been presented to the January 2017 meeting, where they had been noted.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the AGM, held on 16 November 2017, be approved.

TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN ON THE TOWN FORUM'S ACTIVITIES OVER THE PAST YEAR

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The Chairman of the Town Forum for 2017/18, Adrian Berendt, summarised his report on the work of the Forum over the past year, which was a requirement of its Constitution.

Mr Berendt highlighted the following points:

It was hoped that debates in Town Forum meetings, particularly around the Calverley Square Development, had been balanced and measured, and as a body, the Town Forum had tried to remain broadly neutral. The Town Forum had expressed support overall for the project and its ambitions and would continue to do so, although concerns had been voiced in some areas, for example the cost of a new car park.

The role of the Town Forum was to raise concerns, ask questions, make suggestions and to be a critical friend. The attendance by borough councillors to listen to the debate and respond to questions raised by the Town Forum members was appreciated. It was hoped that more Members from the unparished parts of the borough could attend more frequently – it was hoped that membership could be broadened to include county councillors

The Town Forum had 42 active organisations and 36 of those were eligible to vote at the meeting, demonstrating the level of commitment. One of the scheduled meetings had been held at the TN2 centre in Sherwood in an effort to engage with less well represented areas and a similar meeting would be held the following year, hopefully in Showfields.

A great deal of effort had been contributed by members of the working groups and it was within these groups that much of the Town Forum's work was done on a voluntary basis with many hours of work; participation in the groups was encouraged.

Outcomes from the previous year had been mixed:

Positive outcomes had been produced by Culture, Leisure and Tourism Working Group with work on the puppetry festival and the Calverley Square scheme, and with a large amount of work and expertise focused on the Amelia Scott.

The Finance Working Group had looked closely at the boroughs income and spending plans and looking at the critical expenditures decisions in the borough's budget.

The Strategic Planning Working Group's efforts had been recognised through the first confidential draft of the Local Plan. The Group's, and the Town Forum's response to the second phase of the public realm works was one of disappointment, as the latest design did not meet with the Town Forum's original expectation which was for a 'town square' space. Neither did the Group consider that the design justified the cost of the scheme and the disruption to the public realm. All Town forum members were urged to look at the consultation.

Special thanks were made to Alistair Tod who had been a pivotal and inspirational member of the Town Forum, and although he would be standing down as vice-chair, would continue working as a member of the Town Forum.

The Water in Wells Group had continued its excellent work and the theme of water was now widely accepted as a key theme in any development in the town. The Group also continued its work in looking at the promotion of public art.

The Transport Working Group had a number of areas that it had looked at including transport elements of the Local Plan, responses to the Council's Joint Transport Board, changes to Zone A parking restrictions, Linden Park coach parking proposals, the Council's air quality strategy, and the DfT strategy for major roads and networks/cycling and walking investment (members were encouraged to read the report on the positive impact of active travel on the economy in London). The Group had looked at KCC's proposals for moving St Peter's school to Hawkenbury and promoting 20mph zones.

A new Wellbeing group would be set up in 2019 to look at community focused issues in the town; members and a chair were being sought.

Work ahead for the Town Forum included the Local Plan, the borough council's Transport Strategy and a continued focus on the public realm works. More members were needed on the Town Forum and on the working groups, and more member involvement in the Management Group was needed.

Thanks were given to Katharina Mahler-Bech for maintaining the Town Forum website and other social media (including the Twitter account which had approximately 600 followers on @townforum). David Jukes, Leader of the Council and William Benson, Chief Executive, were thanked for their continuing support. Thanks were also given to Mat Jefferys, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager; Jane Clarke, Head of Performance and Governance, and Nick Peeters (Scrutiny and Engagement Officer). Thanks, in particular, were given to Mr Berendt's wife and Family for their long-term support.

A new Chairman was needed for 2019-2020 and volunteers would be sought

The Government's report into cycling and walking safety included a number of positive messages:

- Towns and cities designed for people of all ages and abilities ensuring they were active as part of every day life.
- Communities with access to green spaces connected by traffic free or traffic calmed networks for all.
- Rail and bus facilities suitable for people travelling on foot or by bike and children being able to walk or cycle safely to school.

TO ELECT A CHAIRMAN AND DEPUTY CHAIRMEN 2018/19 - TO FOLLOW

- 5 Nick Peeters, Scrutiny and Engagement Officer, summarised a report, which set out the election process for the appointment of a Chairman and up to two Deputy Chairmen of the Town Forum. Mr Peeters explained the following:

There had been one nomination for the position of Chairman one for the Deputy Chairmen positions, as follows: Chairman – Adrian Berendt; Deputy Chairmen – Alex Green

Mr Berendt had already served two terms as Chairman and Mr Green had served three terms of office as Deputy; while the Forum's Constitution specified two terms as the maximum for holding office, provision was also included for further terms of office, subject to the agreement of members at the AGM.

Mark Booker proposed the election of Adrian Berendt as Chairman for 2018/19; seconded by Jane Fenwick. proposed the re-election of Alex Green as Deputy Chairman for 2018/19; this was seconded by Alistair Tod. election of Alastair Tod as the second Deputy Chairman; this was seconded by Michael Holman. These nominations were endorsed unanimously.

Alistair Tod had stepped down and no nominations had been received for a second deputy chairman. The normal procedure would be followed in the lead up to the 28 January meeting with nominations requested three weeks prior to the meeting. Alex Green confirmed that, whilst he was happy to serve as a deputy chairman, a second position would need to be filled as he was unable to take the lead.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Adrian Berendt be formally declared elected to serve as Chairman for 2018/19, until the date of the 2019 AGM;
- (2) That Alex Green be formally declared re-elected to serve as the Deputy Chairmen for 2018/19, until the date of the 2019 AGM.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS (FOR NOTING)

- 6A There were no membership applications to note.

CHANGES OF REPRESENTATIVES (FOR INFORMATION)

- 6B Mr Peeters confirmed the following changes to the Town Forum Membership:
- Rebecca Dodsworth and Lisa Grant had been appointed as the new representatives for the Friends of Calverley Grounds.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 27 SEPTEMBER 2018

7 The minutes of the meeting dated 6 September 2018 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2018 be approved.

Matters arising – Michael Holman expressed concern that the summary of the previous minutes indicated that the proposals for improvements to phase two of the public realm works produced more of a traffic management plan than the pedestrianised, public space originally indicated.

Councillor Heasman advised that:

A large part of the funding for the works had been provided through the sustainable public transport fund and the bus companies had objected to the original scheme as there was not a viable alternative for rerouting the buses and the bus companies would not be able to operate.

Although a fully pedestrianised space would not be included, the road itself would be considerably narrowed.

The following views were expressed by Town Forum members:

It was felt the Forum should be consulted on the materials to be used in the public realm works

Concern was expressed that the Town Forum had been presented with the public realm options too late in the day and was not being listened to; there appeared to be three sets of steps that were going to one point and there was no reference to water in the design and Tunbridge Wells's history as a spa town. It was felt that this was a broader issue in respect of other consultations and the Town Forum had a role as a critical friend to the Council.

There was also concern that a hypothetical approach had been taken by the bus companies towards the impact of the scheme on the bus routes rather than something more evidence based.

The Town Forum had been consulted during the early stages of the scheme and the design at that point had been much better than that what was now being presented.

ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS, HELD ON 27 SEPTEMBER

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Members discussed the following issues:

Phase two of the public realm works item was included in the agenda and members were encouraged to respond to the consultation. The most recent damage to the pedestrianised area in front of the clock was a result of heavy duty lorries backing on to the paved areas for shop deliveries. Planters had

been placed in the area to prevent this.

Kent County Council (KCC) had a consultation on proposed traffic regulation orders which were for changes to use of the roads and were highways matters. There was a parking consultation, also managed by KCC, which would include a 'virtual parking' system allowing the vehicle owner's permit details to be identified directly through scanning the number plate. The scheme was due to be revisited to ensure that the needs of residents and businesses were met in terms of parking space provision. It was confirmed that residents who already held a permit were able to park in the town's car parks overnight.

REPORTS FROM THE WORKING GROUPS (10 MINS IN TOTAL)

9 The reports of the Town Forum working groups were presented.

REPORT OF THE TRANSPORT WORKING GROUP

9A Jane Fenwick, Chair of the Transport Working Group, advised that there were no additional comments regarding the report.

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKING GROUP

9B Mark Booker, Chair of the Strategic Planning Working Group, updated members on the Groups work. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

Homelessness in the town - the opening of Dowding House as an initiative to reduce homelessness in the borough was welcome. The borough council was encouraged to engage with the Government's moves towards providing new social rented housing developments.

Local Plan - members of the Group had been invited to attend a half-day workshop supported by five planning officers. Confidential information had been shared which demonstrated that the views of the Town Forum were being considered. Work into the local plan was ongoing with continued evidence gathering and research into the development of a garden village in the second half of the 20 year period to alleviate some of the pressure on housing provision. The Council had been commended by other authorities for the broadness of its consultation process on the Local Plan.

Affordable housing provision – this had been difficult for the Council to maintain (normally 35 percent of a development over 10 units) and particularly on brownfield sites, as applicants often claimed through viability assessments that they were unable to afford the provision. This criteria was due to change and new regulations would focus on land costs/value and the affordability allocation. There was also a need for social housing that allowed key workers such as nurses and emergency services workers to be retained locally (£2 billion was being made available in the Government's budget for this sector).

Royal Victoria Place – British Land had made a significant investment in the RVP and there would be a period while the plans for the shopping centre were reviewed. British Land had already decided not to continue with the previous owner's proposals, however, as the owner of the five most successful shopping centres in the country, there would be a further, major investment. British Land specialised in managing this type of facility and were taking a long-term view of the market and how it had changed over the last five years. RVP had provided a unit to Nourish for free and had indicated that other units in Ely Court would be occupied.

REPORT OF THE CULTURE, LEISURE AND TOURISM WORKING GROUP

9C Alex Green, a member of the Culture, Leisure and Tourism Working Group updated members on the Group's work. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

Terms of reference - the Group's terms of reference had been reviewed and the issues it should look at were discussed; Town Forum members were encouraged to approach the Group with any issues they thought needed looking at. The Group was keen to get a younger and more diverse representation. A request was made for volunteers to promote the activities of the Town Forum to schools in the town. It was also proposed that a sub-group of the Town Forum could be initiated that exclusively included younger people and reflected their views.

Trinity Theatre – the heritage activities provided had been expanded on and this would continue with a change to the theatre's articles of association to include heritage as a key element and a specific objective. Part of the change would include the opening up of the clock tower (to include a viewing platform) as a visitor destination – this would be done in association with the Amelia centre operations; a short consultation had already been undertaken and the information was available in a temporary pop-up in RVP.

Library consultation – KCC was undertaking a consultation on the libraries 'Registration and Archives Draft Strategy' which would close on 29 January. Proposals included a county-wide, overall reduction in library opening hours and staff reductions (Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough were not included), saving KCC up to £1 million. The Group felt that libraries contributed to the mental health and wellbeing of communities. There was concern that the importance of the facilities to residents was not being considered. It was important that Town Forum members commented on the consultation. With the roll-out of universal credit, use of the internet for those without access at home was critical and libraries currently supported this facility. The proposed reduction in the opening hours was disappointing as it would impact on this group. An early response to the consultation was important and any social media outlets to express the Town Forum's views and contacting the local MP should be explored.

REPORT OF THE WATER IN THE WELLS WORKING GROUP

9D The Chair of the Water in the Wells Working Group, Michael Holman, updated members on the Group's work. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

Chalybeate spring - there was concern over the future management of the chalybeate spring in the Pantiles as there appeared to be confusion over who, between the borough council and Target Follow, was responsible as both organisations felt the other had the lead responsibility; Target Follow own the premises where the spring is located and the borough council (under an agreement with Target Follow) had a responsibility to maintain the fabric of the spring and to employ the dippers. As a result of this situation, little progress had been made. The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and Tourism and the Economic development Manager had both been written to regarding the issue. Discussions had also been held with the ward councillors who had agreed to look into the relevant policies. The spring was essential to Tunbridge Wells and featured in much of the tourism literature, but was now closed until further notice.

St John's Recreation Ground – an agreement with McCarthy and Stone allowed £10,000 to be set aside for repairs to the fabric of the stone only. The fountain itself still had no water running through it. Additionally, there were parts of the fountain still missing. A response from the Council as to how much additionally would be needed to fully restore the fountain had not yet been received. The Head of Housing, Health and Environment would be approached for further information.

Wiesbaden Twinning Association – Town Forum members were invited by Adrian Berendt and the Twinning Association to an event on 16 December at the ice rink in Calverley Square.

REPORT OF THE FINANCE AND OTHER ISSUES WORKING GROUP

9E David Wakefield, Chair of the Finance and Other Issues working Group, updated members on the Group's work. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2019/20 - The Council's 'draft budget and MTFS 2019/20' had been published and included predicted income and expenditure over the following five years. The Council had succeeded in balancing the budget over the previous ten years despite a long period of austerity. However, as the years had passed, a number of risks had become more prevalent and the although the revenue deficit was small in 2019/20 it was predicted to increase to approximately £500,000 by 2020/2023 if left unchecked. The capital account would break even in 2019/20 but thereafter the reserves would not meet the estimated capital spend. Although explanations as to how the deficit would be met had been provided by the Director of Finance, there were further questions that could be asked by the Group and Town Forum members, and a more diverse representation of members and residents was needed to respond to the draft budget.

TWAANG - UPDATE ON GATWICK EXPANSION AND RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION

- 10 Irene Fairbairn and Angus Stewart, representatives of Tunbridge Wells Anti-Aircraft Noise Group (TWAANG), presented a report on Gatwick Airport noise issues including developments with the Noise Management Board, Gatwick's draft master plan, changes to the reduced night noise trial (including proposed preferred trial routes).

During discussion the following views were expressed:

There was a long-standing argument that if the planes over Tunbridge Wells flew at 6000 - 7000 feet instead of 3500 feet, the level of noise would be reduced. Part of the argument was that separate take-off and landing runways at Gatwick would enable better management of the number of planes landing, allowing a higher flight-path and continuous descent. Additionally, the infrastructure around Gatwick was already congested and it would take a number of years to increase the capacity at Gatwick without impacting significantly on the roads around the airport.

Work was being done on the different ways that aircraft landed at Gatwick and there was some confusion as to why they were approaching the airport at such a different range in heights. The work was also looking at the varying practices of the airlines and the way that pilots use on-board systems. It appeared that, even if solutions were forthcoming, little would be done before 2024. There were aircraft that were exceptionally low (referred to as outliners) and Gatwick was taking action in these cases.

If sound measurements could be obtained it would strengthen the case for reductions in overflying in Tunbridge Wells. It was difficult to find an appropriate site for noise monitors but TWAANG was pushing for a permanent monitor.

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT - UPDATE FROM TOWN CENTRE MANAGER, KAREN PENGELLY

- 11 Karen Pengelly, representing Royal Tunbridge Wells Together (RTWT), updated members on the work towards establishing a Business Improvement District (BID). The following points were highlighted:

The four week ballot period concluded on the 8th November and the result was a positive outcome; there was a 38% turnout and a 74% vote of businesses in favour of establishing a BID. There were three BIDs in Kent – Canterbury, Maidstone and now Tunbridge Wells.

The BID would commence operations on 1 April 2019 and exist for five years with a a rebalot held at the end of the five year period, and businesses asked to vote again. RTWT, as the Bid delivery company, was prepared and ready to commence operations on day one. Each year, we should be able to point to real cost savings that businesses have made through the BID. Real cost savings made by each year by businesses, through the BID, should be identified.

RTWT will maintain the BID structure as a Community Interest Company and will be accountable to all the BID members, ensuring that the BID delivers the services, projects and plans set out in the Business Plan.

The business plan for the BID was created following two lengthy consultations with local businesses, who were to outline their priorities for the town centre area. The four priorities that identified and that form the core areas are:

- Events
- Promotion
- Better town for Business
- Accessibility

It would be some months before definitive pledges and finer detail was available. However, the following day-to-day work was being undertaken:

Events - A £635,000 investment over 5 year into town centre area events. An increased grants fund would be created to support existing events such as The Puppetry Festival, Local & Live and the Lantern Parade. RTWT made £3,000 per year available for the previous three years and this would rise automatically to £20,000 in year one and £25,000 per annum by year five. The events attracted visitors and footfall into the town centre area and benefited the businesses there. In addition to grant funds, an increase in the number and variety of events would be looked at. An Events Group would be created to work on a possible arts festival for the town as well as additional seasonal after-work events for staff from local businesses and residents. The events would be spread across the town centre to ensure that all areas received equal focus. In the shorter term, meetings would be held with organisers and curators at other arts festivals in the South East to discuss further opportunities.

Promotion - the tourism and leisure industry was a competitive sector and the local restaurants, theatres, accommodation providers, attractions and businesses needed support to thrive. A sum of £495K will be invested over the 5 year BID term. This sum will be used to: fund press visits, place branding (so that we have a cohesive and promotable brand) out door advertising on trains and at railways stations, attendance at travel trade exhibitions and trade fairs and literature production and distribution

A Better Town for Business – approximately £300,000 would be invested in a range of services and initiatives such as training, waste and recycling collections for business, seminars, B2B events and recruitment initiatives intended to make the town centre a better place to work. The BID delivery would work with partner organisations or others to leverage greater levels of investment into some of these schemes and would work with Chambers of Commerce on events and training, helping to deliver the best value we to the local business community.

Accessibility - £200,000 would be invested by businesses into accessibility schemes over the next 5 years covering parking, public transport, cycling and work with Shopmobility to promote its services.

RTWT, through the BID was focused on achieving an increased footfall and vibrancy to the town centre. Many local businesses were thriving but needed support to maintain a competitive edge and the ability to access technology and incorporate it into businesses.

RTWT had funds to appoint industry experts where necessary in areas such as training, promotion or curating art events and other creative strategies.

Transport for London had recently published a report on cycling and parking provision that looked at making town centres and high streets more accessible to active travel. It had been demonstrated that road widening and more parking provision did not benefit business and the retail sector in town centres, and that, where the ability to access high streets by car was taken away, people found other ways to travel such as walking and cycling. Fifty percent of the traffic in Tunbridge Wells travelled less than two miles. RTWT was happy to engage with members of Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User's Group in support of this area. The organisation was also happy to engage with Tunbridge Wells Heritage, particularly in respect of heritage open days.

There was encouragement that only 50 percent of the spend of RTWT focused solely on businesses and that a retention on making Tunbridge Wells a better place to live and enriching the lives of residents and visitors was equally as important.

UPDATES FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS' GROUPS

- 12 Representatives from the Over Fifties Forum reported that twiddle boards had been created for bed-bound dementia patients in Pembury Hospital to aid mobility. Members were asked to provide donations of ironmongery so that more boards could be produced.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 13 There was no other business.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 21:00