



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Draft Minutes of Meeting, Thursday 23 February 2006

Present:

Jenny Alexander (Rusthall Village Association), Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Jennifer Blackburn (Rusthall Village Association), June Bridgeman (Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells & District), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association), Karen Fisher (Grove Hill Residents' Association), John Higgs (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), George Lawson (Friends of the Common), Ian Naismith (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Patrick Shovelton (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Fred Sirman (Warwick Park Area Residents' Association), Chris Thomas (The Goodwins No 1/No 2 Residents' Company), Grace Thomsett-Hill (Clarence Road Users' Association), Gill Twells (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association), David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association), Cllr Price, Cllr Wakefield

In Attendance:

Ellie Broughton (TWBC), John Lister (TWBC - up to and including item on Discussions with Business), Daryl Jones (TWBC - up to and including item on Discussions with Business), Keith Farmer (Police Community Support Officer - up to and including item Grimebusters)

Apologies

1. Apologies were received from Graham Bradley, John Goodfellow, Matt Goodwin (Chairman), Mike Hicks, Michael Holman, Dr Michael Larsen, Cllr Bullock, Cllr Mrs Cobbold, Cllr Crawford, Cllr Ekins Dawkes, and Cllr Mrs Mayhew. Mary Harris from the Courier also sent apologies: she had hoped to attend.
2. Christopher Thomas, deputising for Matt Goodwin, welcomed June Bridgeman from the local branch of Soroptimist International. June introduced herself and the work of the Soroptimists who have been in Tunbridge Wells for 60 years representing women from a wide range of professions 'offering service to the Community', particularly helping those whose needs and voices are sometimes overlooked. She gave examples of some of the initiatives taken by the Soroptimists, ranging from research and policy recommendations to hands-on projects and fundraising, and said they were keen to work with the Town Forum to achieve better town facilities and services. Current targets for action were a new Taxi Stand at Fiveways; Fair Trade status for the town; an Information Centre as part of the civic site; and a regular street market in Calverley Precinct. June received a round of applause.

Minutes of meeting of 17 January 2006

3. There were a number of amendments to the minutes:
 - Gill Twells and John Cunningham should have been listed as present.
 - Paragraph 30 – problems relate specifically to Dudley Road. Parking on the pavement is restricting the width available to pedestrians. Rubbish is hung from railings, not put on the verge (there is no verge).
 - Paragraph 34 – the local MP's name is Greg Clark, not Clarke.
 - Paragraph 25 – John Cunningham said that an important point which had been raised, had been omitted in the minutes. According to the Planning/Consultation Timetable presented by Tony Fullwood at the meeting, there would be no consultation on the Retail Review until September/October 2008, some 32 months away, and this delay was unrealistic and unacceptable when it was well-known that Westfield would be submitting plans in 2006 for a massive extension to the RVP, which would be the biggest single development for the next five years at least and would significantly alter both the future of retailing and the future of other retailers in Tunbridge Wells.

4. In addition to these changes, related items were raised:

- Mr Higgs said he wished to have a response from the Council on a planning issue recently reported in the press.
- Mr Higgs queried the purpose of a Traffic Survey undertaken on the 17 November.
(Subsequent to the meeting it has been identified that the survey was commissioned as part of Westfield's investigations for their proposals to apply for planning consent to extend Royal Victoria Place, and as a requirement for that planning consent, ie to consider the potential traffic impacts of their proposals. In addition the survey was commissioned to include some investigations relating to local transport strategy. This data will be forwarded to Kent Highways for consideration.
- Daniel Bech advised that he is aware that a 'blog' site (ie someone's personal record on a website), covering faults in the town, has been established. He has been monitoring the site which has been receiving hits from County and Borough Council computers, and he feels this may have prompted recent comments from the County about the extent of workloads (number of lampposts for example) which they have to contend with. He believes the Town Forum should put pressure on Kent County Council to deal more promptly and effectively with highways, lighting and paving faults reported. It was agreed this should be an item for the next meeting and Ellie Broughton offered to invite the appropriate officer and / or Councillor from Kent County Council to attend.
- Royal Victoria Place should be an item for the next meeting. If someone from Kent Highways (see previous bullet point) is in attendance, then they should be asked to comment on how the RVP proposals are being built into their future highways commissioning.

ACTION POINTS:

- Feedback concern on Retail Review timetable (Ellie Broughton to forward copy of minutes).
- Response to Mr Higgs (Ellie Broughton).
- Invite Kent Highways to attend next meeting (Ellie Broughton).

Matters arising from minutes of last meeting

5. Progress was reported as follows:

- Community Venues Study (paragraph 16) – Tony Fullwood had advised that the draft report should be available for sharing with the Town Forum in April.
- Open Spaces proposal (paragraph 25) – see paragraph 26 below.
- Borough Council budget consultation – Ellie Broughton advised that the consultation period has now closed and that submissions received had been considered by the Council's Cabinet. The resultant proposals were being submitted to Full Council on 28 February. Ellie said that a copy of the proposals was viewable on the Council's website although she cautioned that the level of detail was limited. The proposed Council Tax increase, including the town's 'special expenses', was 4.99%; £82.44 per annum for a Band D property.

Joint discussions with business

6. Two Borough Council officers, John Lister, responsible for Corporate Projects, and a member of his team, Daryl Jones, Economic Development Manager, had been invited to attend.
7. John Lister gave a short presentation summarising conclusions derived from recent research into the local economy. He encouraged Town Forum members to view the full findings on the Council's website but drew out some key risks for the town:
- Erosion of business floor space: companies are moving out or downsizing.
 - An associated loss of business and employment opportunities.
 - Impact on hotels, restaurants and other business relying on trade from business travelers.
 - Unsustainability - profitability for many retailers is not keeping pace with inflation unlike in other towns with who RTW retailers compete, where profitability is increasing.

8. John stressed that these were just examples of many findings which had been debated widely with businesses. As a result a Business Forum had begun to emerge and John was aware of John Goodfellow's proposal that the Town Forum and any Business Forum might usefully meet. John believes the suggestion has merit but noted that businesses are notoriously difficult to engage with – time is money! He asked for members' patience in facilitating discussions and introduced Daryl, the Council's recently appointed Economic Development Officer, a new post reflecting the Council's objective to increasing the priority given to the local economy.
9. Daryl explained that he had started in January, having previously undertaken similar work in Swindon for a number of years. He said that based on the research that John had summarised he was moving forward with an Economic Development Strategy. He said this, and other material, was available on a new 'Business and Economy' section of www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk. Daryl summarised the scope of the strategy and encouraged members to have a look.
10. Patrick Shovelton said he was appalled at the idea of any suggestion of changing the nature of the town. He believed the Council should be encouraging residential development where businesses have moved out and was strongly opposed to any comparisons with places that John had referred to such as Maidstone, Ashford and Bluewater. Royal Tunbridge Wells, he said, remained one of the most beautiful towns in England. He said that the Council's documents fail to recognise the value of the Commons, described as '... to Tunbridge Wells as the sea is to Brighton'.
11. Mr Higgs asked why John Lister had failed to recognise or acknowledge that the management of the town had failed for over ten years, and the consequences of that. He welcomed Daryl.
12. Michael Doyle asked for a printed copy of the documents and Daryl said that any members wishing for a printed copy should contact him. But Michael wished to raise a broader concern: he opposed the practice of the Council (and others) to communicate only through e-mail and via the website, disenfranchising those without electronic access.
13. There was a wider discussion on the effectiveness of Council consultation. June Bridgeman suggested that there should be a standard item on the Town Forum meeting agendas for Council consultations to be discussed. Ellie Broughton advised that the standard item 'Short Announcements' had been introduced for that purpose, being an opportunity to advise members about Council and other agencies' consultations and how the Forum might participate. This had been used to some effect and reflected that the agenda afforded too little time to discuss each consultation in detail.
14. June Bridgeman said that the business review needed to look not just at the town centre, but also at the utilitarian concrete blocks, poor communications, bad pedestrian conditions, lack of facilities for workers etc at the ever burgeoning industrial estate which has sucked away much of the town centre's retail activity as well. She asked what this key business area will look like in ten years and how it will affect what is left behind. She argued that the review needed to think strategically about how it was going to maintain economic activity in the north end of the town when the most important employment and retail generator there – the hospital – is closed down and all that remains is high-density housing served by a clogged traffic through-route, unattractive and dangerous to pedestrians.
15. Jane Fenwick reinforced the earlier point about the Commons, and their importance to the town.
16. Michael Doyle suggested that the highways discussion include consideration of the impact of the proposed cinema development. He also suggested that Daryl Jones be in attendance at the next meeting to hear the discussions.

Grimebusters

17. Keith Farmer introduced himself as one of Kent Police's Community Support Officers and explained his role in a police initiative to reduce graffiti and criminal damage in parts of RTW town area.
18. Keith said the problem of graffiti had emerged at least six or seven years ago in West Kent, which was perceived to be mainly as a result of outsiders coming to the towns using the rail and road networks, daubing bridges and railway property. Local youths had then picked up the fashion and have continued the trend, moving on to stationary objects: walls, fences, street furniture etc since when it has become more visible to local residents.
19. The number of reports of graffiti rose in 2000 and, as a result, various methods of investigation were undertaken. Keith urged residents who see tagging or vandalism taking place not to tackle offenders

themselves but to record the date, time, location and a description of the person responsible for reporting to the police. He described his role in building up a database of photos / tag signatures and generating crime reports which can then be used if a perpetrator is brought into custody. Personal property in schools and elsewhere is also regularly checked by police officers from the Crime Reduction Unit trying to associate tags with individuals.

20. Since 2002 West Kent has had a cleaning machine used by 'Grimebusters' to tackle graffiti. Mr Higgs commented that the drivers of the Grimebuster van are very friendly and since he had asked them to avoid parking on the pavement they had only parked on the roads.
21. Daniel Bech expressed doubts about the realism of encouraging residents to think that graffiti could be tackled: the resources were insufficient, he said.
22. Fred Sirman explained how supportive both Keith and his colleague Pete Heaton had been since being appointed. He said there had been a big improvement in the last six months which residents in his area really appreciated. Mary Wardrop concurred: all members of her Residents' Association now had a card with the contact details on and this had been reassuring and useful: she commended the idea to others.
23. Jane Fenwick asked for Keith's contact details which were provided: Graffiti Hotline – 01892 554159; Crime Reduction Unit – 01732 370677.
24. Keith finished by saying he understood that Kent Police are proposing to increase the number of Support Officers in West Kent shortly.
25. The Chairman thanked Keith for attending.

Reports from Sub-committees

26. Progress was reported as follows:
 - **Open Spaces** - Jane Fenwick presented the proposed submission (previously circulated) and it was agreed that it be formally submitted on the Town Forum's behalf, subject to the addition of:

*In view of the current under-provision of public recreation space within the Borough of Tunbridge Wells, the Borough Council should review its current policy of requiring only developers of large sites to contribute towards new recreational space. The policy should be amended to require **all** developers to make such a contribution - by the use of a Section 106 agreement where appropriate - enabling a financial contribution for this to be enforced as a condition of planning permission for small sites.*

Members expressed their thanks to the sub-committee.

- **Kent Vision** - Michael Doyle presented the submission which had been made by the sub-committee on the Town Forum's behalf, and in liaison with Matt Goodwin, in order to meet Kent County Council's timescale. The Chairman expressed his thanks to the sub-committee.
- **Alterations and Extensions** – Daniel Bech has only received one comment on the draft policy document, from John Goodfellow. It was agreed he should formally respond to the Borough Council on the Town Forum's behalf to commend the document. Christopher Thomas commented that planners should consider the impact on affordability for first time buyers of allowing extensions on smaller properties.

Feedback from meeting with Commons Conservators

27. David Webster gave feedback from the recent Commons Conservators meeting that he had attended, accompanied by Ellie Broughton. He summarised the role and membership of the Conservators who meet quarterly, and whose meetings are open to the public. Membership includes Borough Council representatives and freehold tenant representatives. Jennifer Blackburn, representing Friends of the Commons, also attends. Councillor David Wakefield has recently been elected Chairman of the group and it was noted that he, along with other Conservators, sit on the Town Forum. David Webster said

that the Conservators receive funding annually – this year it was approximately £109,000 this year - through a precept from the Borough Council.

28. David had presented a short history of the Town Forum, its membership and its objectives. He proposed that Steve Budden and Julia Woodgate be asked to attend a future Town Forum meeting to address members on their work for the Conservators.
29. In order to facilitate communication between the Town Forum and the Conservators, Jennifer Blackburn had been asked by the Conservators to report back from Town Forum meetings. David suggested she be similarly asked to report to the Town Forum from Conservators meetings and this was agreed. Finally David suggested members might wish to find out more on www.twcommons.org.uk.

Grot spot update

30. Daniel Bech, representing the sub-committee, reported that the developers of the Cinema site had sought alterations to their planning approval, allowing them to 'de-link' demolition from construction. This potentially means that the site might be cleared and then not built on for some time (ie until the planning approval is about to expire, five years or even not at all) although the developers have provided a timetable which suggests the period between the two phases would in fact be short. Daniel proposed that the Town Forum support the proposal subject to a condition that the cleared site could not be used as a car park and this was agreed. It was also suggested that the developers be invited to display the proposals for members and other residents to view.
31. Daniel also reported that Michael Holman of the Twinning Association had received assurances from Kent Highways that a contractor has been asked to clean and paint town entry signs. The cleaning should proceed quickly, the painting when the weather is warmer.

Short announcements

32. Daniel Bech is due to meet John Lister to suggest a market area be allowed to develop around the millennium clock, partly to discourage anti-social behaviour, but with other benefits too.
33. Ellie Broughton reported that the Council is inviting comments on its ICT (Information and Communications Technology) Strategy which considers such issues as on-line services and joint service provision with other agencies. She said she would circulate a short summary document with details of further information and how to comment. In the light of the earlier discussion on consultation the practice of publishing one-page summaries with further details available on request was welcomed.
34. Members were advised that they can register with Samantha Timms, of the Council's Committee Service, to receive agendas and minutes of Council meetings.

Any other business

35. **Minutes** – It was agreed that, in order to save time at meetings, any queries with the draft minutes should be raised with Ellie Broughton when they are received.
36. **Licensing application for Calverley Grounds and Dunorlan Park** – Jane Fenwick asked for an explanation from the Council as to why it was applying to sell alcohol when parks were included in the alcohol-free zone proposals.
37. **Licensing sub-committee** – Christopher Thomas said that provisional arrangements had been made to visit the CCTV control room and invited anyone wishing to attend to contact him. He is still waiting for details about attending a future Pubwatch meeting. He said there would be an update on Licensing at the next meeting.

38. Items for next meeting

- Highways and related matters (including street lighting and pavements but not verges)
- Royal Victoria Place and Cinema – future developments
- Licensing – update from sub-committee subject to meetings having taken place
- Waste Collection (it was noted that the current contract is shortly due for renewal)

39. Items for future meetings

- Crime and disorder issues (Linda Mortley, TWBC)
- Setting and influencing goals for the future
- Promoting membership of the Town Forum, developing good practice amongst Residents' Associations
- The work of the Commons Conservators

40. Dates of Future meetings

Monday 27 March
Monday 24 April
Thursday 25 May
Thursday 22 June
Thursday 20 July