



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Thursday, 23 February 2012

Town Forum Members in Attendance: David Wakefield (Chairman), Jane Fenwick (Vice Chairman), John Goodfellow, Chris Morris, Dorothea Holman, John Forster, David Webster, Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Jonathon Brooks, Anne Stobo, Angela Phillips, Michael Doyle, George Lawson, Stephen Bowser, I Naismith, John Higgs, John Mattei, Mary Wardrop, Lesley Herriot, June Bridgeman, Marguerita Morton, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Kate Sergeant, Michael Holman, John Cunningham, Christopher Thomas, Councillor Chapelard, Councillor Moore.

1. APOLOGIES

Stephen Marshall; Altan Omer; Maggie Fraser; Philip Whitbourn; J.P Lambert; David Barnett; Kyrios Kyriacou; Councillor Poile; Councillor Bulman; Councillor Neve.

2. DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

None.

3. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

None.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes were agreed as a correct record with the following changes:

In attendance

To add: David Wakefield, Jane Fenwick and Lesley Herriot.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2011

“It was noted that Michael Doyle, June Bridgeman, Jeanne Michau...present at the last meeting.”

5. Matter arising

A) “It was asked if the Mela...”

“...to be a success it could include elements of a Wiesbaden-type Christmas market. A trip to our twin town's 2012 Christmas market was being planned by the Twinning and Friendship Association. The Chairman of TWTFa indicated that Councillor Mayhew, who had been most impressed by the Tunbridge Wells Ice Rink Christmas decorations, would be very welcome to participate in the Wiesbaden visit.”

6. Budget Working Group

“...TWBC would still have the 6th lowest council tax in England. It would take the Council 10 years to catch up with Maidstone Borough Council if this council did not raise their council tax for that period.”

“It was felt by some members that Councillors had inappropriately used council reserves to keep Council Tax artificially low, and thus reduce bills.”

“Questions were asked in relation to the management of Capital Assets belonging to the Council. Councillor Scholes indicated that he was satisfied with the approach taken by Councillor Jukes in relation to the management of TWBC assets. It was queried why the Budget Working Group had not seen papers relating to capital asset management as part of their consultation work. It was suggested that this should be included as part of any future budget consultation.”

8. AOB

“Town Forum members were alerted to a new consultation on a sculpture planned for the Grassy Knoll. Residents were able to vote on the three proposals available to view on the TWBC website. There was some concern raised that forum members had not been given notice that this consultation was active, and it was felt that TWBC needed to do more in future to ensure forum members were aware of any important consultation opportunities”.

5. MATTERS ARISING

5A. PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY UPDATE

Anne Stobo provided an update to town forum members regarding the Public Realm scrutiny review (available on the town forum website www.townforum.org.uk/membersreports/publicrealm-rtwf23.02.2012.pdf).

Discussion

Forum members welcomed the update and discussed whether low cost pedestrian schemes were possible for Tunbridge Wells, and it was felt that the English Heritage Save our Streets campaign could be used successfully to promote this issue.

The Borough Council were currently considering options for public realm enhancements. A good urban design scheme was needed to ensure the town grew appropriately, and s106 monies could be used to contribute to this.

A-boards were noted as a particular problem.

An ‘x’ crossing could be installed outside the Town Hall using future s106 monies, which would make the crossing more pedestrian friendly.

There were action points raised in Getting Around Tunbridge Wells that could be implemented, many of which were self-helping ways to help the town.

Actions

AS The disabled access group agreed to feed in further comments to the scrutiny

review via Anne Stobo.

DW The Chairman agreed to organise a presentation from Alan Legg, Urban Design Team Leader, for a future meeting.

5B. LETTER TO COUNTY COUNCILLORS REGARDING LIBRARY PHOTO BOOTH

The Chairman noted that a letter had been sent to County Councillors following the last meeting of the Forum, regarding the inappropriate placement of a photo booth in the library.

Discussion

The Chairman had received a response from Heather Hilton, Library Manager, which had said that the booth was a temporary measure, and its placement was being assessed against revenue. The Chairman felt there were other locations that already provided this kind of service, and a photo booth in the library was not needed.

Town Forum members felt that as a community notice board had been removed to accommodate the photo booth, this was interfering with a key function of the library.

Actions

DW Members noted the item and the Chairman agreed to follow this up and report back to the meeting at a future date.

5C. DRAFT CONSULTATION RESPONSE FOR LOCAL HERITAGE ASSETS

The Chairman presented a draft consultation response on Local Heritage Assets to the Town Forum members and asked for input into the response. Additional points were added to include historic vistas and skylines as part of heritage assets to be preserved.

Actions

DW The Chairman agreed to send in a consultation response with the discussion points included (appended).

5D. CALVERLEY GROUNDS FRIENDS GROUP

The Vice Chairman notified Town Forum Members of a new friends group for Calverley Grounds, which was being set up to assist with the management of the park for the benefit of residents.

5E. VICE-CHAIRMANSHIP

The Chairman reported that following the sad death of the Vice Chairman, Councillor Peter Crawford, Michael Doyle and Michael Holman had been co-opted as representatives to assist the Chairman for the time-being. Positions for the Forum Management Committee would be voted on in October.

Professor Holman said that whilst he was happy to fill the interim vacancy, others might wish to consider coming forward who were interested in the management of the Forum, as this would help with succession planning.

6. REPORTS FROM THE TOWN FORUM WORKING GROUPS

6A. WATER IN THE WELLS WORKING GROUP

Michael Holman referred to Councillor Mayhew's presentation at the previous Town Forum meeting that we should build on what we had in Tunbridge Wells and aim to make it better. Putting water back in the Wells was pursuing this objective.

A fountain project was a long term ambition, but in the meantime, Tunbridge Wells could look at introducing more water features into the town via a variety of different methods, including more drinking fountains. Professor Holman displayed images of water features from many different cities as an indication of what might be achieved in Tunbridge Wells. The Town Forum needed to work on an overall campaign to raise money, awareness and gain offers of help from experts. A strategy was needed so that the Forum could act immediately as soon as money was available.

Discussion

It was suggested that local firms could advertise on fountains and water features to help with maintenance costs, and many felt that the Royal Victoria Place shopping centre should bring back a water feature although health and safety concerns had caused it to close the last time.

Many felt that the town needed to set an example with its Spa waters, which were currently not in use. The Spa water could be purified and sold to assist with water schemes.

Lakes, parks and gardens in the town were discussed as sites for water features, including Warbury House lake, Holden Pond and St John's Recreation Ground, and it was felt that the Council needed to help investigate these sites a possibilities. Calverley Grounds had been allocated £100,000 for improvements, and the working group could investigate if the money could be used for the purposes of bringing water back into Calverley Grounds.

It was noted that the cost of pumping water through water features could be high, and this was a concern for the project to consider.

Actions

- ALL Forum members agreed to help raise the profile of the project by talking to their own groups about the project, and ensuring that when speaking to Councillors and officers, it was always on the agendas of the decision making groups within the Council.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7A. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING WORKSHOP

The Local Democracy Officer invited Town Forum members to a workshop to be held in conjunction with the Parish Chairman's Forum regarding Neighbourhood Planning.

Discussion

It was noted that this was a big task for parishes and the Town Forum alike.

Parishes were fortunate in that they had boundaries, whereas the Town Forum covered a more disparate area. However, a set of individual plans could be drawn up by the Forum. There was concern that, unlike parishes, the Town Forum did not have the resources to complete this work. However it was noted that the Council had a duty to assist with the creation of Neighbourhood Plans.

The Town Forum, and the Borough Councillors who represented the town, needed to ensure they were working together for the benefit of the whole town, and present representations to Kent County Council on what they wanted to see, including new schools. It was extremely important that Councillors attended the Town Forum meetings and work together with residents. Some felt it was an ongoing problem that Councillors were not in attendance at the meeting, although the Chairman felt this was an unusual occurrence.

Actions

- DW It was agreed that the Chairman undertake an exercise to plot the areas already represented across the town, and seek to fill any areas where there were gaps. The Forum could then start to work on a set of individual Neighbourhood Plans.

7B. JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD UPDATE

Two issues had arisen from the Joint Transportation Board (JTB), and the Local Democracy Officer informed members that a working group from the JTB was being set up to discuss railing placements across the town to assess their appropriateness and need.

John Goodfellow, the Town Forum's representative on the JTB, informed members that a special meeting was taking place to discuss public transport arrangements to the new Pembury Hospital.

Actions

- ALL Members who had comments to make about railings in town could contact County Councillor Roy Bullock, Borough Councillor David Neve, County Councillor Kevin Lynes, County Councillor James Scholes or Borough Councillor Catherine Mayhew.
- JG/
ALL John Goodfellow would feed in the Town Forum's views on this issue to the JTB.
Members who had specific comments to feed in could contact Mr Goodfellow separately before the JTB meeting.

7C. TWITA

The Local Democracy Officer informed members that a new group was being launched called Tunbridge Wells is Traffic Aware, which would look at raising awareness of road safety amongst specific groups.

Actions

- ALL Members interested in attending the launch event should contact the Local Democracy Officer for more details.