



Thursday 23 May 2013

Attended: Cllr Bob Backhouse, Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Lorna Blackmore, Stephen Bowser, June Bridgeman, Cllr Ben Chapelard, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Jane Fenwick, John Forster, Maggie Fraser, Alex Green, Michaela van Halewyn, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Glen Horn, Sue Kaner, Jim Kedge, Bill Kern, George Lawson, Katharina Mahler-Bech, John Mattei, Chris Morris, Marguerita Morton, Cllr David Neve, Altan Omer, Cllr James Scholes, Cllr David Scott, Alastair Tod, David Wakefield (Chairman), Mary Wardrop, Cllr Mrs Lynne Weatherly, Philip Whitbourn (sub) and Cllr Chris Woodward

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Democratic and Community Engagement Manager), Jo Wiltcher (Museum Manager) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Cllr David Jukes, Cllr Jane March, and Anthony Fisser and Eddy Walsh (from KCC Youth Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Tim Harper, Léonie Harrington, Angela Phillips, Kate Sergeant, Anne Stobo, Margaret Watts, Chris Wigley and Cllrs Peter Bulman, Mrs Catherine Mayhew and Frank Williams.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

The Democratic Services Officer advised on the following changes in representation: (a) Pantiles Traders' Association – where Glen Horn was no longer the appointed representative; (b) Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Park – where the Chairman, J Paul Lambert, had stood down from the committee; (c) Clarence Road Users' Association – where David Webster had stood down and his replacement, Bill Kern, was welcomed to his first meeting; and (b) Transition Tunbridge Wells – who were no longer active in Tunbridge Wells, meaning that their representative and substitute, Kate Sergeant and Carole Barnes, respectively, would no longer be members of the Town Forum.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That, with the addition of the name of Cllr David Scott to the list of those having given their apologies for absence, the minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2013 be agreed.

4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

7 March 2013

4 Evidence of formal appointment to the Town Forum

MMcG Representatives to submit evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that, even though there had been some progress, there were still 40 representative organisations who had not yet submitted evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum. The Chairman reiterated once more the importance of submitting this information, in the interests of good governance. He added that member representatives should ensure this evidence was submitted, to safeguard their voting rights at and beyond the next AGM, due in November.

12(c) Access to consultation documents in the Library

MMcG To take this matter up with the Library Manager and see what facility could be provided during the building works.

Following a site visit and discussions with the District Customer Services Officer, it was noted that adequate provision was in place during the current building works, with an additional space which could be provided, if needed.

5. UPDATE FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cllr David Jukes was welcomed to the meeting, to provide an update report on a number of town centre initiatives which the Borough Council was leading on. He began by advising Forum members that a study had been commissioned to assess the feasibility of developing a **cultural hub** for the town. He added that the selected consultants would report their findings in the Autumn, at which point it would become clearer as to how best to take the proposal forward.

Cllr Jukes particularly welcomed the prospect of a cultural hub which was likely to be on the site of the **Museum, Library and Adult Education Centre**, as it would provide the top end of the town with an iconic building residents could be justifiably proud of.

The Leader also advised that, the previous week, all members of the Council had had the opportunity to be briefed on a '**conservation statement**' for the **civic centre site**, which the Town Forum Chairman had also attended. This had been commissioned jointly by TWBC and English Heritage; the purpose of the statement, the Town Forum was told, was to enable TWBC to assess and develop its understanding of the heritage significance of the buildings and to set out their potential for change and to be able to accommodate new uses, to enhance their contribution to the vibrancy of the town centre.

Cllr Jukes next advised on how TWBC would like to see the 'shared space' plans for Mount Pleasant develop, between Monson Road and Upper Grosvenor Road. He added that KCC were generally supportive of the proposal, so TWBC would be commissioning the same consultants that KCC favoured in examining the scheme in detail. To the great interest of Town Forum members, the Leader advised that it was the intention that a water feature would be included as part of this initiative.

The Chairman invited questions from Forum members, as follows:

- (i) Cllr Backhouse expressed the hope that, if the cultural hub were to be realised, it would act as a focus for the whole of West Kent. The Leader felt that its appeal and 'draw' would be even wider than that, encompassing East Sussex as well;
- (ii) Sally Balcon, although welcoming the proposals, felt that the cinema site required more urgent attention. Cllr Jukes reiterated how TWBC had pressed very hard to achieve the position it had currently, where the asbestos removal would be taking place and detailed drawings of redevelopment proposals would shortly be available. The Leader also pointed out that TWBC did not own the site;;
- (iii) Michaela van Halewyn enquired about the business rates position with the owner of the cinema site. Cllr Jukes advised that TWBC had initiated formal legal proceedings, adding that the hearing had been deferred, pending the submission of further information from the site owner. He added that he was in regular contact with the owner and constantly reminded him of the rising cost of the business rates liability;
- (iv) Jane Fenwick welcomed the Leader of the Council's statement, as it supported several of the ambitions of the Town Forum expressed over a number of years for the future of the Town Hall complex of buildings and for 'shared-space' schemes;
- (v) Dorothea Holman referred to the member briefing on the conservation statement and asked whether TWBC was working in similar harmony with English Heritage on traffic and transport issues in the town. The Leader advised that TWBC was keen to work with English Heritage on all relevant issues.

The Chairman expressed the Town Forum's thanks to the Leader of the Council for his update and for answering questions.

6. DRAFT CULTURAL STRATEGY

June Bridgeman, the Chairman of the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group, had earlier circulated her group's proposed response to TWBC's draft Cultural Strategy. In her opening remarks,

Mrs Bridgeman thanked the Leader of the Council for TWBC's proposals to enhance the Museum and Art Gallery to promote culture-led regeneration.

One of the recommendations set out in the proposed response to TWBC was that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might usefully review what the working group had identified as 'planning deficit' in terms of a clear, coherent policy framework for the next five years.

Although Mrs Bridgeman had been unable to attend that morning's first of two public meetings, where interested parties had been invited to give their feedback on the draft strategy, the Chairman advised that it had been very informative and well organised, where a warm welcome had been given to the Council's broad plans. Mrs Bridgeman added that she had been told by others who had attended that the interactive session had been particularly welcome.

Michael Holman felt that the working group's recommended response should be endorsed, adding that the Town Forum should acknowledge that detailed proposals will emerge, once the consultation stage has ended.

The Leader of the Council picked up on the 'five year' element referred to above. He advised that this was exactly the right sort of time frame in which to provide both a vision and a master plan for the town, adding that this would be one of his key actions over the coming months.

Cllr Jane March, the Cabinet portfolio-holder responsible for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development, thanked those members of the Town Forum who had attended the morning's public meeting on the draft Cultural Strategy. She had been very pleased and encouraged by the response and the quality of the input.

The Chairman highlighted one particular aspect of the morning's session, namely where one should draw the geographical boundaries of the cultural 'offer' of Tunbridge Wells. He expressed the hope that this could be reflected in how the document was developed. Cllr Jane March acknowledged that point, adding that this formed another element of work which had been commissioned.

RESOLVED – That the proposed response to TWBC's draft Cultural Strategy, as prepared by the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group, be endorsed and submitted and that thanks be conveyed to the members of that working group for their detailed work.

7. YOUTH SERVICES IN TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Eddy Walsh, KCC's Senior Youth Work Practitioner, provided Town Forum members with a presentation on the current level of youth support services within the town centre and wider area. He responded to member questions as follows:

- (i) Dorothea Holman enquired about the 'target' age group. Mr Walsh advised that this was, in the main, 13-19 year olds, although the Streetcruizer service covered a wider age range. He added that the afternoon provision (between 3 and 6pm) was aimed at supporting the younger age group;
- (ii) Dorothea Holman also asked how the various support services were publicised and therefore reached out to those most in need. Mr Walsh stressed the importance of publicising in a manner that young people felt happy to access, so social media was an important element, although 'word of mouth' was also effective. He also emphasised how talking to the rest of the community in which young people lived was an important and sometimes overlooked aspect;
- (iii) Dorothea Holman enquired if young people had identified any specific services or issues which they wanted in the town centre. Mr Walsh advised that having somewhere safe to go was a key need, adding that the facilities which KCC were able to provide were really only basic;
- (iv) John Forster enquired if there was any benefit in reintroducing a youth forum, which used to exist. Mr Walsh said that there were already plans to reinstate a youth forum, with a remit to respond to formal consultation processes and to raise issues of concern or interest amongst young people;
- (v) June Bridgeman invited Mr Walsh to say what youth issues her Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group might usefully discuss at their next meeting. Mr Walsh said that, in general terms, he would like to see greater support for the actions of young people being viewed in a more positive light;

- (vi) June Bridgeman also asked how the Camden Centre might be modernised, in order to improve its facilities for young people. Mr Walsh felt that the Camden Centre was seen positively among young people;
- (vii) Cllr Scott raised the issue of music and its importance to young people. He enquired how greater encouragement could be given to involve more youngsters in music in the town. Mr Walsh believed that more 'small scale' opportunities would assist, adding that The Forum on the Common was a good example of how this worked effectively. Cllr Scott asked whether KCC were already supporting this approach, to which Mr Walsh added that some specific music events were receiving some KCC direct funding;
- (viii) Cllr Scholes advised that, through his KCC member fund, he might be able to assist specific groups in their youth service work.

Cllr Woodward, who had been appointed as TWBC's 'Youth Champion', responded to some of the issues raised. He advised that he was keen to reinvigorate the youth forum, adding that in its previous guise, it had been drawn exclusively from school representatives, which maybe reflected too narrow an opinion of views.

Cllr Woodward also expressed his keenness to see KCC's plans for a permanent youth hub in the town centre come to fruition. He stressed that the provision of the afternoon support service for young people currently running in the Camden Centre was only temporary but he acknowledged that there were funding issues which needed to be overcome before a permanent facility could emerge.

Cllr Woodward's key message was that we should all find ways to communicate with young people, rather than to confront them. He also reminded Forum members that there were other strands to the provision of youth support services in the town, e.g. through churches, the YMCA, Voluntary Action in West Kent and CXK (delivering the Connexions service).

Adam Chalmers, TWBC's Democratic and Community Engagement Manager, added that TWBC had been working closely with Mr Walsh, who had made a recent presentation to the Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chairman of that Committee, Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew, had also written to the KCC Cabinet portfolio-holder responsible for youth service provision, seeking reassurance about the commitment to a permanent youth hub; she had also sought support for a relatively small increase in KCC funding, to be able to develop the current Camden Road service from two afternoons a week to three.

The Chairman thanked Mr Walsh for his presentation and responses to member questions, adding that the contribution which young people can make to the debate about the future of the town was often overlooked. He also enquired whether the Town Forum could assist in efforts to find volunteer drivers for the Steetcruizer bus. Mr Walsh advised that this facility had now been transferred by TWBC to the Weald Rural Activities Partnership. He advised that it would be very helpful to have a few more volunteer drivers for the double-decker bus, adding that anyone interested must have obtained their driving licence before 1997.

There were no specific action points arising from this item.

8. SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

Philip Whitbourn, who had been appointed as the chairman of a working party, tasked with preparing a draft response to the above document, paid tribute to the hard work and effort of his group. He drew attention to page 12 of the agenda, in which he had prepared a summary of the key issues which he felt should form the basis of the Town Forum's formal response to TWBC's document. The full text of the working party's recommended response had been circulated to all Forum members ahead of the meeting.

The key issues were presented as follows:

- (a) Housing numbers – Dr Whitbourn explained how it had been agreed that there was nothing to be gained from challenging the housing figures contained in the Core Strategy. However, the working party believed that there was an over-provision set out in the Site Allocations document and that the allocation for Hawkenbury should be reduced, to accord more closely with the Core Strategy position. The consequence of that proposal, Dr Whitbourn added, would be the removal of the area to the north of Hawkenbury Road, which was within the Green Belt; in addition, it was noted, there was a recommendation that the 'area of search' for new housing at High Woods –

again, within the Green Belt but also in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – should be strongly opposed.

- (b) Retail floorspace provision – Dr Whitbourn’s group felt that misgivings should be expressed about the quantity and the distribution of new shops contained in the document. Objections were also proposed for the extension of the ‘primary shopping area’, which covered the Assembly Hall and the Library. Dr Whitbourn went on to say that the recommended approach to the civic complex was to support the ideas envisaged in the document produced by the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Party (‘A place of pleasure and resort’), as supported by the Town Forum. Finally on this element, Dr Whitbourn added that the working party believed that the report of the Town Plan Advisory Panel, as supported by the Town Forum at their July 2012 meeting, provided a good framework for the future of the Town Hall.
- (c) Transport – Dr Whitbourn and his working party favoured keeping options open for the possibility of connecting Tunbridge Wells to a second London to Brighton main line, based upon the former Tunbridge Wells West station. On traffic issues, attention was drawn to a response on the working party’s proposed submission, from the acting chair of the Traffic Strategy Working Group, Jane Fenwick. Her working party had expressed great concern at the impact of new development on existing traffic levels, leading to further congestion; they had asked that ‘traffic’ and ‘development’ should be considered as one and not separately and asked that the Town Forum’s response to the draft Transport Strategy 2012-26 (submitted to TWBC in April) should be taken into account by the Borough Council when considering responses to the Site Allocations document.

The Chairman enquired if individual resident associations and other interest groups had submitted their own responses to the Site Allocations document. Michael Holman felt that, because the topic had been so complex, inviting an e-mail response might not have been the right format. However, he added that he welcomed the proposed response of Dr Whitbourn’s working party and commended the report for formal submission to TWBC.

The Chairman thanked Dr Whitbourn and all the members of his working party, for such a comprehensive outcome. Mary Wardrop added her own thanks to the working party, for their support they had shown for the community of Hawkenbury in this work.

RESOLVED – That the draft response to TWBC’s Site Allocations DPD, as prepared by the working party established for this purpose, be fully endorsed and approved.

9. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – The Chairman, Michael Holman, started his update report by welcoming the announcement from the Leader of the Council regarding the shared space/Fiveways scheme water feature proposal.

He added that the working group’s progress since the last meeting had been focused on the following: (i) ensuring that the vision of a spa town featured in key strategy documents wherever possible, to provide a policy ‘hook’ for implementing the vision of the Town Forum; (ii) engaging groups and individuals to support the spa town vision; (iii) initiating a small publicity campaign, which was featured in the Courier; and (iv) making an application to Companies House, to establish a community interest company, capable of raising and spending funds on creating water features.

On specific sites which had been identified as possible water feature locations, Prof Holman remained optimistic about: (i) the roundabout at Notcutts in Pembury; (ii) the development of Grosvenor and Hilbert Park; and (iii) the former Kent & Sussex hospital site. He was less so about Brighton Lake on the Eridge Road, where significant practical problems existed, concerning the electricity supply.

Finally, Prof Holman expressed how pleased he was with the improved appearance of the Chalybeate Spring on the Pantiles, which had been cleaned up in time for the start of the main tourist season.

Cllr Neve asked whether the Water in the Wells Working Group had access to the historical data held by the Friends of the Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, to help them in their work. Prof Holman confirmed that this was the case.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – June Bridgeman, Chairman of this group, advised that the next meeting (18 June) would be focusing on issues for young people, adding that any other interested Town Forum member was welcome to attend.

Mrs Bridgeman added that her group was also looking at how to develop the souvenir offer for visitors to the town. Alex Green, from Trinity Theatre, was assisting the group in this work, by means of an on-line survey, details of which can be found from the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Dqdeoc79fMn8nUFIQpwNmvuwPfhmGzOQkHQQFN0X4vY/viewform>

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Traffic Strategy Working Group – The acting Chairman, Jane Fenwick, reported that her group had been in discussion with the TWBC Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Planning and Transportation – Cllr Alan McDermott – and with TWBC's Head of Economic Development – David Candlin – on follow-up issues to the draft Transport Strategy 2012-26. Mrs Fenwick added that the working group was aiming to meet with Joint Transportation Board members, as well as KCC county councillors in the next few weeks, to share their continuing concerns with them. She proposed that the July meeting of the Town Forum have as its main focus a feature on transport matters.

Mrs Fenwick thanked the Borough Council for its easily-found 'Parking and travel' button on its refreshed website, (although she believed the 'pothole reporting' link required correcting). Cllr Scholes added that now was a good time to report a highway pothole, as new highway gangs had been employed. On this topic, Cllr Scott reminded Forum members of how effective the 'Looking local' mobile phone application was in reporting potholes.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Planning and Development Strategy – Michael Doyle, Chairman of this working group, advised that he had nothing additional to report beyond supporting Dr Whitbourn's earlier presentation.

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that he had no issues to report to the wider membership.

There were no specific action points arising from the above reports.

10. TOWN FORUM REPRESENTATIVE AS OBSERVER AT MEETINGS OF THE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

Jane Fenwick proposed that the Town Forum members formally appointed to be observers at future meetings of the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) should be: Sally Balcon and herself. (Sue Kaner, it was noted, was happy to stand down from this position.)

Similarly, on the Borough Council's Public Transport Forum, Mrs Fenwick proposed that Peter Perry and Stephen Bowser become the formally-appointed observers.

Mrs Fenwick added that the next meeting of the JTB would include an item on the continuing issue of the Pembury Road/Cornford Lane traffic signals. She added that this issue highlighted her dissatisfaction with the structure of decision-making on transportation matters.

RESOLVED – That the above appointments be confirmed.

11. FUTURE CONSULTATION ISSUES

Mike McGeary had circulated a list of future consultation issues which the Borough Council would be leading on, drawn from TWBC's 'Notice of Intent to Make Key Decisions'.

Attention was drawn to the 'public realm improvements' item, which was due to be submitted to the 20 June Cabinet meeting, on which the Town Forum would be formally consulted. Michael Holman enquired about the extent of the area under consideration. Adam Chalmers advised that it would be the area around the Millennium Clock. Prof Holman asked whether this might act as a model scheme for other sites; Mr Chalmers confirmed that yes, this would provide an opportunity for the Borough Council to assess what works best and how this might be applied to other sites in the future.

There were no action points arising from this report.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Grosvenor and Hilbert Park – David Barnett advised that: (a) approximately 5,000 people had attended the family day held on 6 May; (b) there was just one week left before the public consultation stage on the improvement scheme ended; and (c) another event had been organised, on Sunday 9 June, entitled 'Music in the Park'.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Town Forum administrator advised that meetings for the remainder of the year had been arranged as follows:

Thursdays 25 July, 26 September and 28 November (to include the AGM), all starting at 6.30pm.

The meeting concluded at 8.10pm.