



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 23 November 2006

1. Present:

Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Jenny Blackburn (Vice-Chairman of the Town Forum / Rusthall Village Association), Graham Bradley (Rock Villa and Hanover Road Residents' Association), June Bridgeman (Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Bruce Goodwin (Grove Hill Road Residents' Association), Michael Hicks (Inner London Road Residents' Association), John Higgs (Hanover Road and Rock Villa Road Residents' Association), Michael Holman (Twinning and Friendship Association), Simon Joyce (Benhall Mill Road Residents' Association), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove), George Lawson (Friends of the Commons), Ian Naismith (Hanover Road & Rock Villa Road Residents' Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Patrick Shovelton (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Edward Tomlinson (St Barnabas Community), Chris Thomas (The Goodwins No.1/No. 2 Residents' Companies), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association), Tricia Wright (Calverley Park Association – Substitute for Chris Weller) and Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association) - and Cllr Peter Crawford, Cllr Adrian Ekins-Daukes, Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew, Cllr Leonard Price, Cllr David Wakefield.

In attendance: Cllr Roy Bullock, Samantha Timms (Senior Committee Administrator, TWBC) and Sheila Wheeler (Chief Executive, TWBC)

2. Apologies:

Jenny Alexander (Rusthall Village Association), Matt Goodwin (Chairman of the Town Forum / Tunbridge Wells Village Residents' Association), Caroline McCann (Beulah Road Residents' Association), Fred Sirman (Warwick Park Residents' Association), Gill Twells (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association) and Chris Weller (Calverley Park Association) - and Cllr Peter Bulman.

(Jenny Blackburn, Vice-Chairman took the Chair for the duration of the meeting)

3. Government's White Paper

Sheila Wheeler, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Chief Executive attended the meeting and stated that the White Paper had been released on 26 October and that the aim of the paper was to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives.

She outlined the options for possible change from the existing operational model including Unitary or Pathfinder status, a directly elected mayor, a directly elected executive of councillors or a leader elected by fellow-councillors with a 4-year mandate. An invitation had been received inviting the Council to bid for Unitary status or to become Pathfinders in better two-tier working in areas like Kent. The response to the invitation would need to be returned by 25 January 2007. Sheila pointed out there was no additional funding as a point of information.

The Town Forum noted that there would be key areas, one being to provide a strong and prosperous community and another being Parish Councils and how they could be better involved and improve their powers to local authorities. Sheila stated that a report would be submitted to Cabinet and

Full Council over the coming months, but as yet no timescale had been arranged. She also stated that the Council was very proud in performing strongly at 52% in the top quartile nationally.

Members of the Town Forum asked Sheila many questions and at the end thanked Sheila for her attendance and the information that she had provided.

Action:

3.1 That Town Forum Members be urged to read the White Paper which is available on the Council's website (www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk).

4. Membership Changes – None to report.

5. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 26 October 2006

The minutes were agreed, subject to the following amendments:

Amendment to minute 8 - 'Grot Spots'

"Grot Spots Re-visited - Daniel Bech gave a short presentation on the town's top ten grot spots from 2005 which highlighted that there had been little, or no, improvement in any.

Daniel also noted that it had been agreed with Gary Stevenson that the 'Brighten-up RTW' Focus Group, now Townscape and Street Scene Committee, would act as a formal complaint body.

The Town Forum was extremely disappointed in these clear areas of failure and asks TWBC to attend to grot spot issues as a matter of priority."

Amendment to minute 10 - 'Planning Committee', last sentence should read:

"These were also adopted together with the Committee's priorities."

6. Matters Arising/Actions Completed from the Meetings dated 28 September and 26 October 2006

Actions still outstanding from 28 September 2006 Town Forum:

- Action 6.2– the decision to charge £25 per item for disposal was still outstanding and that a report be submitted to a future Town Forum meeting.
- Action 8.1 – Matt Goodwin to follow up with Janet Naim on the job description for the Press Officer
- Action 9.1 – the Town Forum agreed that Mr Bech should draft a short paper/letter and submit it to TWBC Lois Howell, Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services, to ascertain whether the wording was legally sound.
- Action 9.2 – Councillor Bullock informed the Town Forum that Mike McGeary was currently on annual leave and that the information requested had not been identified; he stated that this would be brought to the next Town Forum meeting in November.
- Action 12.1 – Matt Goodwin informed the Town Forum that he had met with the TWBC Director of Planning and Development, Mr Cottrill; he went on to say that he would be arranging a meeting with the other Directors in due course and would circulate the dates of his meetings as soon as possible.

Actions:

- 6.1 Action 6.2 - A report be submitted to a future Town Town Forum meeting regarding the £25 disposal charge.
- 6.2 Action 8.1 - Matt Goodwin to provide feedback regarding the job description for the Press Officer.
- 6.3 Action 9.1 - Daniel Bech to update the Town Forum as to whether he had submitted a short paper/letter to Lois Howell and if he had ascertained whether it was legally sound.
- 6.4 Action 9.2 – Councillor Bullock to report back on the land ownership for the strip of land between the Station and Morrison’s car park.
- 6.5 Action 12.1 - Matt Goodwin to inform the Town Forum if he had met with the other TWBC Directors and to circulate the dates of his meetings as soon as possible.

Actions outstanding from 26 October 2006 Town Forum:

- Action 5.2 and Action 9.2 – as above, Councillor Bullock to report back on land ownership.
- Action 10.4 – Vision Committee to submit their Terms of Reference to the next Town Forum.

Actions:

- 6.6 Action 10.4 – Vision Committee to submit their Terms of Reference to the next Town Forum.
- 6.7 The Committee Administrator circulate to all Town Forum members the power point presentation and script of Robert Cottrill’s presentation on 26 October meeting.
- 6.8 Action 7.1 – The Committee Administrator to seek a reply from Robert Cottrill regarding Mr Goodfellow’s questions.

Actions Completed:

- Action 10.1 – Nominations for Committees received.
- Action 10.2 - Transport Committee Terms of Reference were submitted and adopted by the Town Forum on 26 October Town Forum.
- Action 10.3 – Priorities were submitted to 26 October Town Forum.

7. Town Forum Frequency of Meetings

This item was deferred until the next Town Forum meeting.

Action:

- 7.1 That the Town Forum frequency of meetings be discussed at the January meeting of the Town Forum.

8. Terms of References

Transport Committee – John Goodfellow briefed the Town Forum on the Transport Committee's six key areas of concentration, those being: Street lighting; Taxi services; Traffic management within the centre of the town; Congestion on the A26; Public transport; and Railway Station.

June Bridgeman went on to explain that the Transport Committee had also discussed the issue relating to taxi stands at Fiveways and in Camden Road. She went on to state that the closure of Morrison's supermarket had created an economic crisis for taxi drivers by the Station, who had lost a large section of their daytime trade due to its closure.

Members of the Town Forum were reminded of the Soroptimist report "Taxis in Tunbridge Wells" that identified strong public demand by users and drivers for a substantial high visibility taxi rank at the top of the town in place of the present unused hidden sites.

The Town Forum were informed that given the economic desirability of making the town centre shopping as enjoyable and simple to use as possible, rather than shoppers taking their custom elsewhere, urgent steps would be necessary to create a temporary taxi rank at Five Ways; this may well be achieved by one of the following:

- A Temporary Traffic Order suspending the double yellow lines at Five Ways behind the clock, but allowing licensed taxis only to stand there;
- Extend to daylight hours the night-time taxi rank in Camden Road near Jaeger; or
- Erect a temporary large sign on Dixons wall and in Royal Victoria Place and other publicity indicating where the two taxi stands can be found.

The Town Forum agreed that the solutions were possible and that the views of the Town Forum be forwarded to the Portfolio Holder to investigate.

Actions:

8.1 That in the economic and social interests of Tunbridge Wells, the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum calls on Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Kent County Council to urgently install temporary new taxi stands at Fiveways and in Camden Road.

8.2 That the Committee Administrator forward the concerns of the Town Forum, their recommendation and background report to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, Councillor Peter Davies, for action.

Planning Committee (formerly Town Forum Strategy Committee) – Philip Whitbourn informed the Town Forum that the Planning Committee had met on 21 November. The meeting was very successful and various issues had been discussed, in particular, the Leisure Strategy that had been circulated for consultation.

He went on to say that one particular area of the Strategy related to 'Open Spaces', however, the Strategy was unclear as to which areas fell within the 'Open Spaces', for instance Dunorlan Park. Another query that was raised was how frequent the events would be – Philip stated that all Members of the Town Forum should look at the Strategy and if they had any questions relating to it then they should contact him as soon as possible.

Philip also informed the Town Forum that a Community Plan Partnership meeting had taken place on 16 November. This meeting was also very constructive and discussed matters relating to the Government's White Paper and the Local Development Framework (otherwise known as the Local Development Plan). Three ideas were raised at this meeting regarding: 1) the statement for community involvement, 2) the Development documents that include core documents to start in January/February 2007, and 3) Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Action:

8.3 That any Members of the Forum who have a question/query relating to the Leisure Strategy to put it in writing to Philip Whitbourn as soon as possible.

Townscape and Street Scene Committee – Nothing further to report.

Vision Committee – The Chairman of the Committee informed the Town Forum that the town's railings would be one of the Committee's key issues to investigate, i.e. are they necessary, and are the safety railings in the right place.

Housing and Environmental – Chris Thomas submitted the Housing and Environment Committee's Terms of Reference. These were adopted by the Town Forum subject to some minor amendments/changes as follows:

- Bullet point 2 – add an 's' at the end of Association.

Under the heading Initial Aims add

- Any urgent issues relating to transport access
- Disability issues relating to housing
- Air quality

Other Actions:

8.4 Housing and Environment Committee consider the additions/amendment to their Terms of Reference and if in agreement, provide updated Terms of Reference to the next Forum meeting.

8.5 Vision Committee to submit their Terms of Reference to the next Forum meeting (January 2007).

9. Any Other Business

Habitat Building – John Cunningham presented to the Town Forum a paper relating to the Habitat building. The Town Forum was provided with background information relating to the building. They noted that the site was originally a Congregational Chapel, in 1848 and remained a Chapel/Church until the early 1980s. The Town Forum noted that various constraints still exist on the property, which protect the rights of both the owners and the South-Eastern Railways in relation to the railway tunnel which runs beneath it, and also the freeholders and leaseholders in relation to the water supply to the site.

John stated that the leasehold was sold in 1984 by the United Reform Church Trust to Habitat Mothercare plc for a period of 150 years. Members of the Town Forum were also informed of the land registration and that there were three titles on the land; John went through these for Members. The ownership was a much more complex situation; again John went through these.

The Town Forum, after given due consideration to John's findings, agreed that something would need to be done to preserve the building and make it more useful for the people of Royal Tunbridge Wells as the current owners were selling the building in February 2007. Members urged that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council ascertain a way to acquire the building.

Members gave several suggestions for the new use of the building, for example, an information centre, an exhibition centre or even meeting rooms. The Town Forum suggested that maybe this would be a case for receiving 'Heritage Lottery Funding'; these were all ideas that the Council should investigate.

Actions:

9.1 That the Town Forum fully supports the proposal of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society, in conjunction with other organisations in the Town, to investigate and ascertain a way in which the Habitat building can be put to use for the benefit of the people of Royal Tunbridge Wells and urges the Borough to support this proposal.

10. Date of next meeting – Thursday 18 January 2007 at 7.30pm; any reports/short papers to be emailed/posted to Samantha Timms no later than 12noon on Monday 8 January 2007.

Action:

10.1 Add item to the January agenda to consider frequency and format of future Forum meetings.

10.2 That the Committee Administrator provides Town Forum Members with the closing date for receipt of reports/small papers for inclusion in forthcoming agendas.