



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Wednesday 23 November 2016

Attended: Caroline Auckland (sub), Sally Balcon, Cllr Ronen Basu, Adrian Berendt (Chair), Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, Cllr Peter Bulman, Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Jane Fenwick, Chris Gedge, Tim Harper, Cllr Lawrence Heasman, Jennifer Hemming, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Rachel Jenman, Bill Kern, Kyrios Kyriacou, Linda Lewis, Cllr Peter Lidstone, Brian Lippard, Katharine Mahler-Bech, Cllr Tracy Moore, Peter Perry (sub), Angela Phillips (sub), Cllr Catherine Rankin, Cllr James Scholes, David Scott, Tim Tempest, Alastair Tod, David Wakefield, Mary Wardrop, Denise Watts, Pat Wilson and Cllr Chris Woodward

TWBC officers present: Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance and Corporate Services), Kevin Hetherington (Head of Communities and Wellbeing), Paul Taylor (Director of Change and Communities), Jo Wiltcher (Museum Manager) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Cllr Mrs Julia Soyke and Reg Bandy

Guest presenters: Irene Fairbairn and Angus Stewart (speaking on behalf of TWAANG)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: David Bushell, Cllr Bob Backhouse, Cllr Ben Chapelard, Alex Green, Cllr David Jukes, Altan Omer, Nick Pope and Cllr Don Sloan.

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

New members approved by the Town Forum's Management Committee:

Organisation:	Representative:	Substitute:
Grove Hill House Residents' Association	Chris Gedge	Jon Pugh
Tunbridge Wells University of the Third Age (U3A)	David Scott	Adrian Twiner

Mr Gedge and Mr Scott were welcomed to the meeting, as was Rachel Jenman, the Town Centre Manager representing Royal Tunbridge Wells Together, an organisation whose application had been approved in September.

The Chair added that there were still many areas of the town which were not represented on the Forum. He welcomed ideas from existing members as to how to encourage further resident associations and other interest groups to become involved.

The Chair also suggested that it might be of benefit to the Town Forum to consider holding its meetings at locations other than the Town Hall, to help encourage wider interest and involvement. Michael Doyle expressed concern with the proposal; he reminded the group that mention was made in the Constitution that the Borough Council provided administrative support and made facilities available for Forum meetings and he considered it important not to lose that link. The Chair noted the concerns and agreed it was important to maintain good relations with the Borough Council.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting dated 22 September 2016 were submitted for approval.

Both John Cunningham and Brian Lippard challenged the lack of an action point under minute 7 – ‘pavements – encroachment, clutter and enforcement in the town centre’. Mr Cunningham said that he had expected Mr Baughen (TWBC’s Development Manager) to advise the Town Forum on how the Borough Council could be more proactive in dealing with possible incidents of encroachment. Similarly, Mr Lippard said that he had hoped that Mr Baughen would have provided a specific answer to say whether tables and chairs were permitted under the Colonnade on the Pantiles.

Jane Clarke, TWBC’s Head of Policy and Governance, said that Mr Baughen had certainly been discussing these issues with the highways authority – KCC – and that answers would be provided for the Forum at the next meeting.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2016 be approved; and
- (2) That Mr Baughen be asked to provide the Town Forum with answers to the two issues relating to pavement encroachment at the next meeting.

4. ACTIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

6(b) Fiveways

Cllr Ronen Basu, TWBC Portfolio-holder for Sustainability, provided a short update report on the progress of the remedial works at Fiveways. He advised that the emergency works to the gas supply infrastructure, combined with the wet weather, had delayed completion. However, he advised that all remedial work was scheduled to be complete during the following week. Cllr Basu added that all of the paving slabs used in the remedial work were natural stone.

5. UPDATE REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cllr David Jukes, TWBC Leader, had sent his apologies and would provide an update on current issues at the next meeting.

6. TWBC’S DRAFT BUDGET AND ITS CORPORATE PRIORITIES FOR 2017/18

Lee Colyer, TWBC’s Director of Finance and Corporate Services, reported on the Borough Council’s draft budget for 2017/18. A copy of his report which had been presented to the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board on 8 November had been circulated with the agenda. He added that, after the Cabinet had considered the draft budget on 1 December, it would be subject to full public consultation, for a six week period.

David Wakefield, Chairman of the Finance and Other Issues Working Group, asked to what extent car park revenue would reduce the authority's currently-anticipated budget deficit. Mr Colyer advised that the proposed car park charges for 2017/18 were being considered by the Cabinet on 1 December. If approved, Mr Colyer advised that there was an anticipated net benefit of £300k to £400k, after the increase in business rates to the authority's car parks had been applied.

Mark Booker asked how the draft budget would be affected by the Council's liability to pay back-dated business rates to shop units on North Farm Industrial Estate – potentially a sum of £4m. He added that he felt that the Borough Council had been harshly treated by the imposition of this policy upon local government, especially after TWBC had played a leading role in the major upgrading of the highway through the business park.

Mr Colyer said that, should the businesses on North Farm (or elsewhere) be successful with their appeals, there would not be a direct impact on the authority's revenue budget nor on the provision of services. However, he said that, where it would impact was on the Council's ability to benefit from net business growth. He added that he was particularly concerned over the lack of transparency with the process, with tribunal settlements made in private. Mr Colyer added that he would continue in his efforts to raise the authority's concerns with central government.

With the Council's draft corporate priorities for 2017/18, Mr Colyer drew attention to three new issues, namely items 1, 7 and 10, set out on page 55 of the agenda. As with the draft budget, Mr Colyer advised that, once these had been approved by the Cabinet on 1 December, the draft corporate priorities would be subject to formal public consultation.

Cllr James Scholes stressed that this was Forum members' opportunity to comment on the draft corporate priorities and make representations to the Council if they so wished.

The Chairman added that the topics covered in the corporate priorities fell within the remit of all of the working groups, and he urged Forum members to feed in their thoughts and comments to the respective chairmen, adding that a composite response would be prepared and submitted by the stated deadline.

Action points:

- (1) After the draft budget and corporate priorities have been approved by the Cabinet, relevant working groups be asked to meet and to formulate their responses, ready for a composite response to be sent to the Borough Council; and
- (2) David Wakefield and the Finance and Other Issues Working Group be asked to (i) consider the draft budget (ii) to obtain clarification from Mr Colyer (where needed) and (iii) provide feedback.

7. TUNBRIDGE WELLS CULTURAL AND LEARNING HUB

The Chairman welcomed Paul Taylor (Director of Change and Communities), Kevin Hetherington (Head of Communities and Wellbeing) and Jo Wiltcher (Museum Manager) to the meeting, to provide an update on the proposals for a Cultural and Learning Hub.

Ms Wiltcher provided a detailed update report, which included: the procurement of the design team for the scheme; the list of other activity and development aspects where specialist advice was being sought; the outcome of the recent user questionnaire; and the next stages in the development, with relevant timescales.

Linda Lewis, Chairman of the Culture Working Group, whose members have been closely following the progress of this scheme, thanked Ms Wiltcher on what she described as a very interesting and inspiring project. She asked if a copy of the presentation could be circulated, which Ms Wiltcher undertook to provide for interested Forum members.

Mrs Lewis said that there was one unanswered question from the list she had sent in advance, namely "has the Borough Council reconsidered the siting of Gateway in the light of the newly proposed civic centre". Ms Wiltcher advised that part of the reason why the Heritage Lottery Fund agreed to fund the project very substantially was because the presence of the Gateway within the hub would encourage an even greater number (and a wider demographic group) to access the heritage and cultural attractions.

Kevin Hetherington, TWBC's Head of Communities and Wellbeing, added that the Heritage Lottery Fund was in fact quite excited at the proposal to include Gateway services within the hub. He added that, by the time the scheme was open and operational, it was very likely that Gateway services would have developed much further along the digital route and link even more readily to the other hub services.

Paul Taylor, TWBC's Director of Change and Communities, said that there was good evidence that Gateway and Library services were provided from within the same unit elsewhere in the UK.

David Wakefield emphasised that there would still be significant numbers who would not be able to access Borough Council services digitally. Mr Hetherington acknowledged this argument, adding that there would always be a need for some face-to-face contact. Mr Taylor advised that a key function of the hub staff would be to support people and help them gain confidence in using the digital services.

Michael Holman felt that the proposed hub represented an exciting and inspiring project. He asked whether the architects had been briefed on the Borough Council's proposals for the Mount Pleasant Road phase of the public realm improvements, so that there was full joined-up thinking in place, as the two schemes developed. Ms Wiltcher confirmed that this was the case, adding that the timescales of the two projects were well-linked. Mr Hetherington added that the architects for the hub were excited about the planned public realm improvements.

Mr Wakefield asked to what extent the running costs of the hub would be affected by additional costs which had been identified. Ms Wiltcher advised that the business case which had been developed was based on known TWBC and KCC running costs which, because it would be a joint operation between the two authorities, would be lower than at present. She added that it was expected that the hub would qualify for more grant funding, as it progressed towards completion.

John Cunningham asked whether the relocation of the present Gateway service into the hub would release some funds tied up in the current Grosvenor Road building, which could be used to support the new running costs. Mr Hetherington advised that no decision had yet been made on the future of the current Gateway building, thus it was not possible to say whether there would be funding available to help.

Jane Fenwick expressed the hope that the exhibition space within the hub would be used with both visitors and residents in mind, within the context of 'permanent' and 'changing' displays. Ms Wiltcher confirmed that, while there would be a programme of different exhibitions, which it was known were often the reason for many repeat visits

by residents, there would also be permanent displays to showcase highlights of the acquisitions, such as the costume collection.

Cllr James Scholes added that some of the Museum's collections were of the quality and interest that they were available for either touring exhibitions or temporary display elsewhere.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked Ms Wiltcher for her very interesting and informative update. He added that Forum member thoughts and suggestions should be fed into the work of the Culture Working Group through its Chairman, Linda Lewis.

Action point: Any comments on the proposals for the cultural and learning hub should be made to Linda Lewis, Chairman of the Culture Working Group.

8. AIRCRAFT NOISE – UPDATE REPORT FROM TWAANG

Irene Fairbairn and Angus Stewart from TWAANG (Tunbridge Wells Anti-aircraft Noise Group) provided a detailed update on (a) progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the Arrivals Review Report and (b) details on the progress of the Gatwick Noise Management Board, upon which TWAANG were represented.

Cllr Rankin congratulated Mrs Fairbairn for the progress made and the part played by TWAANG. She also endorsed the line followed by central government that arrivals/departures should avoid urban areas as much as possible. Mrs Fairbairn acknowledged the point; she added that the argument put forward that aircraft noise at night was no worse than ambient levels really only applied to city centres and not to towns.

Cllr Basu thanked the TWAANG presenters for their informative update. He reiterated his previous point about the toxic effect of burnt aircraft fuel, adding that he had still not had his question answered regarding the level of pollution that this produced. Mrs Fairbairn advised that the remit of TWAANG did include the matter of air pollution; while she was unable to answer Cllr Basu's specific question, she said that there were published papers available which showed that noise was proven to have the potential to cause serious health problems.

Peter Perry said that the issue of continuous descent had been discussed for over 20 years without resolution, adding that he felt that greater pressure should be applied. Mrs Fairbairn agreed, adding that TWAANG were trying to encourage a review of the 'continuous descent approach' (CDA).

Cllr Heasman added his congratulations to TWAANG for their progress. He agreed that the CDA was not, in his view, working, with 'planes leaving the stack' not at 7,000' but more likely at 4,000'. He asked what progress was being made in monitoring noise around the flight path. Mrs Fairbairn said that while this aspect was being discussed, it had not yet been progressed, adding that she expected some pressure to be applied.

Cllr Scholes asked what the probable cost of noise monitoring might be. Cllr Heasman estimated that the cost of a suitable mobile recording system would be between £5k and £10k for each unit. Cllr Scholes wondered whether the revenue obtained through fining the airline companies for 'low flying' could be used to fund the purchase of noise monitoring equipment. However, Mrs Fairbairn said that 'low flying' was defined at less than 2,000', thus the vast majority of airlines were considered to be complying with the relevant regulations.

Jane Fenwick thanked the TWAANG representatives for their very helpful update and endorsed the view expressed by Cllr Rankin in respect of avoiding flight paths over

town areas. She asked if there was a clear definition of what constituted the Tunbridge Wells 'town area' in this respect. Mrs Fairbairn advised that, for this purpose, TWAANG argues that Tunbridge Wells is regarded as a 'conurbation', including Rusthall and Langton Green together with Southborough and Bidborough, all forming part of the town area.

Mrs Fairbairn said that she felt there was a lack of an 'urban voice' in respect of concern over concentrated flight paths over Tunbridge Wells, adding that she believed that TWBC was not being sufficiently forthright in this respect.

The Chairman asked what active support the Town Forum might be able to provide. While no specific actions were put forward, it was agreed that TWAANG should maintain close contact with the Town Forum, to keep them informed on progress. Mr Stewart advised that, once the TWAANG website had been re-built, individual members would be able to monitor progress. He added that feedback on the issues being reported on was very welcome from Forum members.

Action point: The Transport Strategy Working Group to maintain close contact with TWAANG and alert the wider Town Forum to important developments.

9. LOSS OF MURALS AT TUNBRIDGE WELLS RAILWAY STATION

Michael Holman thanked the Town Forum for its support voiced at the last meeting, leading to him writing formally to Southeastern Rail to (a) register the Forum's deep concern over the loss of the murals and (b) suggest a co-operative way forward in replacing the murals with art work of a similar impact.

Mr Holman advised that, following discussion with senior staff at Southeastern, he was happy to report that they were willing to assist with replacement, including funding for the actual installation. Mr Holman added that Refresh Tunbridge Wells was currently putting together a list of possible artists and a brief for the project. He added that it was hoped that, beyond the initial 'seed corn' funding, the scheme would attract sponsorship.

Mr Holman said that the aim was to install an original piece of artwork that was vibrant and colourful. He added that a range of formats was being considered, including mosaic and panels similar to the hoardings surrounding the cinema site. Mr Holman emphasised the need to move swiftly with this initiative; he invited volunteers with the relevant experience or knowledge to come forward to help with progress.

Action point: Members of the Town Forum to volunteer their help and support with this project by making direct contact with Michael Holman.

10. A VISION FOR ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Mark Booker advised that TWBC's Planning Policy team had approached the Town Forum, to invite them to contribute towards assessing the priorities for the town as part of the current review of the Local Plan. Mr Booker added that this was within the context of the town's natural setting, the richness of its building fabric and its leisure and tourism facilities.

He advised that this was an opportunity to feed in some of the work and findings of a number of Town Forum reports from the recent past. He added that the Forum's Management Group would extract and submit relevant sections from these past reports in the format requested by the Planning Policy team. He invited Forum members to contribute towards this process by making direct contact with him.

The Chairman welcomed this opportunity and emphasised the importance of contributing positively to the request.

Action point: All Town Forum members to identify relevant findings from past reports produced and feed their views into Mark Booker before Christmas.

11. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Transport Strategy – Jane Fenwick drew attention to her Working Group’s update report, which had been circulated with the agenda.

Mrs Fenwick drew particular attention to the following: (a) **A26 cycle route consultation** – where she urged interested members to attend the consultation meetings planned; and (b) the **CAU restaurant**, where a satisfactory outcome had been achieved over their excessive use of the pavement area, following the actions of the Town Forum.

On the issue of pavement encroachment, Michael Doyle was pleased to advise that at 1 Warwick Park, the dining tables and chairs which had been positioned in Chapel Place had now been removed.

Planning and Development Strategy – Mark Booker, Chairman of this Working Group, reported on a number of key planning-related topics, as follows: (a) **Site Allocations DPD** – despite this having been declared ‘sound’ by the Government-appointed inspector, the developer of one specific site which had not formed part of the DPD was seeking a judicial review of the whole document. Mr Booker explained that a High Court judge would now determine whether a judicial review was justified, adding that this process was using up considerable Planning Policy team staff resources; (b) **Call for sites** – TWBC had now published the full list of sites on their website. Mr Booker gave a few examples from the list of possible development sites, adding that this matter would be closely watched; (c) **Landscape character area assessments** – Mr Booker said that the Working Group would be contributing towards this evidence base; (d) **Major developments** – Mr Booker advised that the Working Group was also maintaining a close watch on significant development schemes such as the cinema site and Hawkenbury Farm.

The Chairman thanked Mr Booker for his report; he urged Forum members who felt they could contribute to the Working Group’s work to make direct contact with Mr Booker.

Water in the Wells Working Group – Michael Holman, Chairman of this Working Group, introduced his update report, which had been circulated with the agenda. He urged Forum members to view the Knights Wood water feature in the town square, if they had the opportunity.

The Chairman thanked Mr Holman and his Working Group colleagues for their hard work in achieving so much in persuading developers to install water features, the overall effect of which did much to enhance the appearance and appeal of the town.

Peter Perry said that he would like to see the same positive impact with the provision of water features on the town’s main roundabouts.

Culture – Linda Lewis, Chairman of this Working Group, advised on TWBC’s latest stakeholder meeting relating to the new theatre. She advised that, while an acceptable alternative scheme had been found for the car parking provision, there were other

aspects which had not yet been determined, such as detailed design and the internal space within the proposed theatre, where her group would welcome further information at an early point.

The Tourism and Leisure and the Finance and Other Issues Working Groups had no additional items on which to report.

RESOLVED – That the progress reports be accepted.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) **Planning applications and councillor ‘call-ins’** – Cllr Rankin advised that 90% of planning applications at TWBC were determined by Planning officers, under delegated powers set out in the Council’s Constitution. She added that the decision process also allowed for councillors to ‘call-in’ any applications that would normally be determined by officers under specific conditions set out in the Constitution. Cllr Rankin advised that one of those conditions used to be if “considerable public concern” had been expressed about a specific application. She said that that form of wording had been removed at some point, adding that there seemed to be no evidence of why or when this had occurred.

Cllr Rankin believed that the ‘considerable public concern’ was an important part of a councillor’s representative mandate. She sought Forum members’ support for pursuing the matter further and determining whether the removal of these grounds for call-in had been taken in an open and proper manner.

The Chairman joined others in voicing support for Cllr Rankin pursuing this matter, and tackling the apparent lack of transparency.

Brian Lippard broadened the discussion; he said that there was a widely-held view amongst Civic Society members of dissatisfaction with the planning system, a statement which Alastair Tod endorsed.

Lorna Blackmore agreed with the views of Cllr Rankin. She added that she had been disappointed to learn that neighbours were no longer consulted by letter about planning applications but instead had to rely on spotting site notices. Cllr Bulman felt that the previous practice of writing to neighbours should be reintroduced.

John Cunningham voiced his concerns over the apparent lack of a proper weekly plans list (of planning applications). Cllr Bulman said that he had investigated this issue and had found that the non-parished part of the Borough was listed first, with the town area following on later in the document.

Returning to Cllr Rankin’s statement, Cllr Scholes supported her in her attempt to determine whether the removal of the grounds for call-in had been carried out by way of a formal decision. Mark Booker endorsed the agreed way forward, adding that, with a number of the points raised above, the fact that the planning support service had now returned to an in-house function should help to address the concerns set out.

RESOLVED – That the Town Forum supports Cllr Rankin’s efforts to gain more transparency on planning applications and to re-instate “considerable public concern” as a reason for calling in an application.

(b) **Carrs Corner** – Jennifer Hemming raised the issue of safety in respect of the Carrs Corner roundabout. She said that her Residents’ Association had received

much help from ward councillors to try and address the concerns they had raised. Mrs Hemming compared the issue with what had been achieved in terms of road and pedestrian safety in Camden Road as part of the RVP expansion plans, under the terms of a Section 106 agreement. She pointed out that councillors and the public were unaware that officers had been seeking improvements to an otherwise safe and workable junction rather than to nearby Carrs Corner, where there have been long-standing concerns about pedestrian safety. She asked what the process had been which had led to such an outcome.

Action point: The Chairman undertook to take up the issue of transparency direct with TWBC.

- (c) **Ice rink** – Michael Holman advised that there would once again be a Wiesbaden/Twinning chalet at the ice rink this year, over the period Friday 9 to Sunday 11 December. It was agreed that all Town Forum members would be very welcome to meet at the chalet on Saturday 10 December, at any time between 2 and 4pm, to celebrate another busy and successful year.

Mr Holman added that the Twinning Association would be gathering at the chalet on the Sunday from 2.30pm, where Association members would be able to enjoy a free glass of Glühwein.

- (d) **Warwick Park drainage** – John Cunningham gave a short update on the progress made in addressing the long-standing problems of drainage and flooding in the Warwick Park area. He felt that, while a start had been made in trying to resolve this matter, the fundamental problem was that the Borough Council needed to take a lead in conducting a thorough review of the drainage infrastructure across the town, otherwise the system was in danger of very significant failure as the larger housing developments proceeded.

Action point: The Chairman will raise this matter with the Borough Council.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 19 January 2017 at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 8.45pm.