



## ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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**Thursday, 24 January 2019**

#### **Present:**

**Members in Attendance:** Stuart Anderson (Beulah Road Residents' Association), Caroline Auckland (Soroptomist International of Tunbridge Wells and District), Sally Balcon (Friends of the Commons), Tim Ball (Calverley Park Crescent Association), Adrian Berendt (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group), Lorna Blackmore (Grantley Court Residents' Association), Mark Booker (Culverden Resident's Association), Stephen Bowser (Residents First), David Bushell (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery), Diana Butler (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Jocelyn Cheek (Trinity Theatre), Robert Chris (Grove Hill House Resident's Association), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Carolyn Gray (The Avenues Association), Alex Green (Trinity Theatre), Michael Holman (Water in the Wells), Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents' Association), Linda Lewis (Tunbridge Wells Puppetry Festival), John de Lucy (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery), Marianne MacDonald (Nourish Community Foodbank), Katharina Mahler-Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Helen Mitcham (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Museum, Library and Art Gallery), Marguerita Morton, Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Land Association), Councillor David Scott, Tim Tempest (Friends of the Grove), Alastair Tod (Poonah Road Resident's Association), Denise Watts (Tunbridge Wells Over Fifties Forum), Lucy Willis (Clarence Road Users Association) and Councillor Chris Woodward

**Officers in Attendance:** Lee Colyer and Gibbons, Head of Policy and Governance.

#### **APOLOGIES**

- 14 Apologies were received from David Wakefield, Jane Fenwick, Brian Lippard, David Barnett, Karen Pengelly, Rebecca Dodsworth, Councillor Tracy Moore, Councillor Nick Pope and Councillor Lynne Weatherly.

#### **DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

- 15 There were no declarations of substitute members.

#### **MEMBERSHIP CHANGES**

- 16 One notification of a membership change had been received:
- Joan Boenke replaced Dean Kenward as the Hawkenbury Village Association representative.
- The Chairman, Adrian Berendt, reminded members that the Town Forum was still seeking the appointment of a second deputy chairman.

#### **MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS (FOR DECISION)**

- 17 There were no membership applications for consideration. However, Margarita Morton advised that United Nations Association had expressed an interest in establishing a link with the Town Forum.

It was noted that Sevenoaks had established a young person's town council which could be used as a model for Tunbridge Wells.

#### **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2018**

- 18 The minutes of the previous meeting dated 24 November 2018 were agreed subject to minor changes.

#### **ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS - TBC**

- 19 There were no actions from the previous meeting that were not included on the agenda.

#### **UPDATE FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL (10 MINS)**

- 20 Leader of the Council, Councillor David Jukes, addressed the Town Forum members and highlighted the following points:

Councillor Jukes said the he microphone and sound system in the Council Chamber had been affected by the use of Wi-Fi and had caused problems during meetings. He advised that the issue was being looked at.

Councillor Jukes was optimistic that the cinema site would make a start in 2019 and the developers were meeting with him on 4 February to present the operation plans for the next stages of the scheme.

Councillor Jukes said the Council was progressing with its own projects and phase two of the public realm works was due to start on 28 January outside the Town Hall. He said some success had been achieved with phase one but there had been a learning curve and it was recognised that there had been issues with the quality of the construction work. He added that phase two would be of a better standard and the Council would provide a clerk of works to monitor the quality of the work at each stage.

Councillor Jukes said contractors and tenders were being reviewed for the Cultural and Learning Hub (the Amelia) and the scheme would involve a two year build.

With regard to the public enquiry for the Calverley Square development, Councillor Jukes advised that it would commence on 12 February and materials for the scheme would be looked at in the next week with Nicholas Hare, appointed by Mace as the design build architects.

Councillor Jukes said that, although outside of the scope of the Town Hall, but of particular interest to the town, significant progress had been made on the Berkeley Homes site in Hawkenbury and KCC were due to submit an entry for a two form entry school at the site.

During discussion the following points were raised:

Michael Holman asked what measures the Council was taking to install functional drinking fountains. Councillor Jukes advised that it was not within the organisation's remit to provide drinking fountains but it was working towards reducing single-use plastics in the Town Hall. Mr Holman said there were several initiatives within the town to provide these facilities which needed coordination.

John Cunningham asked about Warwick Park Conservation Area proposal which he considered was an issue that could be easily progressed. Councillor Heasman advised that the necessary work had been completed and was waiting for submission onto the Council's Forward Plan for a decision by the Cabinet.

Mark Booker asked if Allies and Morrison retained an interest in the Calverley Square scheme. Councillor Jukes reiterated that they were the architects for the scheme but that Nicholas Hare had been appointed by Mace as the design-build architects with a focus on the final details. He added that Allies and Morrison would be retained by Mace in a supervisory role.

Dorothea Holman asked about the materials for phase two of the public realm works as those used for phase one marked very easily. Councillor Jukes said the materials for the next phase had already been chosen and continuity with phase two had been retained through the choices.

John Cunningham expressed concern that the Berkeley Homes development in Hawkenbury would impact on the Warwick Park sewerage system which was already at 75 percent capacity. Councillor Jukes said he would discuss the technical issues with Berkeley homes. He added that there were other areas of infrastructure such as energy supply that were also at capacity and of concern. He said that much of the support needed for infrastructure was at government level but was not being provided.

Michael Holman said that Town Forum members had expressed dissatisfaction at the previous meeting over the entire phase two project and in particular the process through which the final design had been chosen and the design itself. Mr Holman questioned how the width of the road in the final design and the levels of traffic now envisaged fitted in with the overall design. Councillor Jukes said that following public the consultation process it became evident that changes were needed and it would not be possible to stop buses going through the area. He added that traffic levels at Fiveways had reduced by 90 percent, but that, unless comprehensive changes were made to the road infrastructure in the town with the support of government funding, congestion would continue to be an issue.

Adrian Berendt reminded members that a survey in 2016 demonstrated that 90 percent of the traffic that travelled into Tunbridge Wells, stayed in the town. Mr Berendt went on to say that he hoped that the Urban Design Framework, a supplementary planning document, and one which supported the 'string of pearls through the town centre' concept, would be re-adopted in the near future. Councillor Jukes asked that the Town Forum to support his opposition, as Leader of the Council, to proposals from Kent County Council for another secondary school on the Pembury Road. Mr Berendt added that a radical solution was needed.

Mr Holman referred to the supplementary planning document for Arts in the Public Realm saying it was a welcome step and that he hoped that the ratification of the document would be expedited. He added that It was also hoped that a Public Realm supplementary planning document that provided a basis for securing section 106 funding would be put in place also.

Councillor Lidstone advised that residents of York Road had expressed concerns about the road becoming a rat-run upon the closure of other roads. He added that Kent County Council had suggested signage prohibiting HGVs but concern remained about the volume of other vehicles that would potentially use the road. Councillor Scott added that the completion of the works would take several months and it was important that the management of traffic during that period was appropriate.

#### **DRAFT BUDGET UPDATE FROM LEE COLYER, DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT (10 MINS)**

- 21           The Director of Finance, policy and Development, Lee Colyer, presented an update on the Council's 2019-20 Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy. During discussion, the following points were raised:

Alex Green asked for more detail on the starting point for the benefit from business rates growth. Mr Colyer advised that in 2013 the government introduced the localisation of business rates retention and set a baseline with an expectation of growth occurring naturally, and with local authorities sharing in the benefits from anything above that threshold. Mr Colyer said that in 2015/16 the growth proceeds were approximately £60,000 and In 2018 the proceeds were approximately £1.7 million. He said it was important that the borough was promoted in order to encourage investment and growth.

Robert Chris asked for more detail on the negative revenue support grant. Mr Colyer said that Government had announced through the publication of the provisional local government settlement, that government policy was that all negative support grant would be funded centrally, by government, from its own business rates growth resources. The settlement for Tunbridge Wells had been received and the negative revenue support grant was not included.

Steve Bowser asked what the revenue expenditure for the Council was. Mr Colyer advised that the Council had a gross revenue budget of £65 million which was spent on the services provided and was matched by £65 million of income. He said this was detailed in the draft report considered by the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board.

The level of detail allowed on council tax bills was prescriptive (according to government guidelines) and the split between the major precepting authorities was not allowed to be included. The detail was, however, included in the draft Budget report.

Marieanne Macdonald asked how the proposals for a permanent supply of electricity to the Ice-rink would be affected if the Calverley Square scheme did not take place. Mr Colyer advised that the uprated electricity supply for the Ice Rink was dependant on the entire system being upgrade as part of the Calverley Square development.

Mrs Macdonald asked also asked if Grant Thornton were fit to undertake an audit of the Council based on recent headlines. Mr Colyer explained that the Council's auditors and their role was to sign off the statement of accounts. The auditors who did the work specialised in the public sector and only audited local government and the public health sector. The auditors used had no connection to high street businesses.

Mrs Macdonald went on to ask if the increase in council tax and how it was distributed could be advertised. Mr Colyer advised that the pie-chart which demonstrated the percentage share of the total council tax bill was included with the council tax leaflet on the Council's website. He added that the graph showing the cash amount of the increase was another useful way of publicising council tax. Mr Berendt said the Town Forum would be a helpful way of publicising how council tax is structured.

Councillor Lidstone said Town Forum members should be encouraged to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner's (Mathew Scott) office with suggestions on how the increase in Kent Police's precept should be spent. Councillor Jukes said he had already written to Mr Scott suggesting that a contribution to the borough's CCTV operations should be made.

Mr Holman asked for detail on how the Ice-Rink reserve would be used. Mr Colyer said the use of the Ice Rink reserve to uprate the electricity supply would be a Full Council recommendation and in principle had already been agreed by the Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board. Mr Colyer added that the Cabinet would then have an opportunity to agree the recommendations or make alternative proposals on to Full Council. He further added that future surpluses would be used to offset against any downturn in the weather that impacted on attendance at the Ice Rink, and said that If the reserve built up again there would be further opportunities for the Council to decide on its use.

## **KCC LIBRARIES CONSULTATION**

22 Caroline Auckland provided an update to members on the Kent County Council libraries consultation. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

Mrs Auckland reminded members that there were five days left for responses to the consultation with the link included in the report. She said there were a large amount of had-copies available in the library. She added that the facilities in the Amelia and Southborough libraries were protected, however, those located at Tonbridge, Sherwood and Showfields were not and and throughout Kent there would be a large reduction in opening hours, resulting in those libraries affected only being open at weekends. Mrs Auckland asked for it to be Usage of the Showfields library had increased by 10 percent contrary to the trend for other libraries.

Mrs Auckland said the proposals meant a decrease in the availability of computers as well as books and that that staff would lose their jobs, with a dependence on volunteers stretching the service. Mrs Auckland urged for a response to the consultation.

Adrian Berendt said a 24 hour period should be allowed for a members to comment and to provide a joined up response. Linda Lewis had spoken to

The Head of the Kent Libraries Service, James Pearson, who had advised that the proposals did not include the complete closure of any of the libraries and that all libraries were able to apply to the Arts Council for the funding of new projects. and the communities affected by the proposals could put pressure on the County Council to find new ways to resource them.

Lorna Blackmore expressed concern that residents without access to the internet for issues such as universal credit applications, who would normally use computers at libraries, would suffer under the new proposals.

Councillor Chris Woodward advised that Borough councillors had met Kent County Council officers the previous week at a meeting chaired by Greg Clark MP, and the libraries issue was discussed, with many of the Town Forum's concerns reflected at the meeting. Councillor Woodward highlighted that the use of Showfields library had increased by 10 percent.

Councillor Lawrence Heasman said the Citizen's Advice Bureaux had been provided with funding to support people who had universal credit enquiries. He added that the Gateway was also available to provide support.

Marguerite Morton and Councillor Woodward both referred to areas such as around the TN2 Centre and at Knights Park where there was development and where cuts in the hours of opening for libraries would have a detrimental impact in the future

Mr Berendt said he would meet with Mrs Auckland to look at the content of the final response to the consultation prior to its submission.

## **USES FOR THE EMPTY PROPERTIES IN THE RVP**

23 Alistair Todd updated members on the suggestions for alternative uses and activities in the Royal Victoria Place (RVP) units. Mr Todd advised that the brief provided by the new owners of the RVP, British Land, was to look at activities that moved away from an almost entirely retail offer to one that included more 'experience' based offers. The agenda included a comprehensive list of ideas that had come forward. During discussion the following points were raised:

Adrian Berendt asked if the suggestions were for temporary use. Mr Todd advised that in the short-term, the empty units may easily be filled but in the long-term British Land were looking to provide a different type of centre. Mr Berendt said a suggestion had been made for a community piano which were proving successful in other environments.

John Cunningham suggested that the units could be used to house many of the museum items that were currently in storage (approximately 80 percent) including an extensive and highly regarded costume collection.

## **PUBLIC REALM /TRAFFIC REORGANISATION SCHEME FOR MONSON ROAD TO MOUNT PLEASANT ROAD TRAFFIC LIGHTS AND RESPONSE FROM JTB TO TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDERS**

24 Adrian Berendt advised that the traffic regulation orders in relation to the public realm works had been considered and endorsed by the Councils' Joint Transportation Board. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

Michael Holman said the Town Forum should once again register its dissatisfaction with the process and what had been achieved. He did not think there was value in now stopping the project. However, as a lesson for the future, he felt the Town Forum should register its displeasure.

Mr Berendt clarified that the initial plan seen in January presented more of a 'town square' concept and that between January and October the town Forum had not been able to input into the process further prior to the final decision. Mr Berendt felt that an opportunity had been missed to do more without necessarily, any further expenditure.

Councillor Heasman reminded members that the original plan had been completely turned down by the bus companies as the majority of the bus routes passed through the road outside the Town Hall and room was needed for the buses to pass. The support of the bus companies was needed to secure the funding.

Mr Holman noted that a compromise had to be reached but that the Town Forum should still register its dissatisfaction with the process. Mark Booker said there would be major disruption over a period of time, with complaints from shopkeepers and the public. He added that the final scheme, based on the concerns of the bus companies, were hypothetical worries, rather than anything based on empirical evidence. He further added that the main impediment would be the traffic lights on the Church Road. He said the Town Forum should register its dissatisfaction of a failed scheme.

Councillor Scott said the bus lobby was a strong group and resistance to any significant changes and the group's views may have been coloured by the problems experienced during the first phase of the public realm works. He added that early consultation with the bus companies and a more joined up approach to place-shaping would have made the process easier.

## **MEMBERSHIP OF WELLBEING WORKING GROUP**

25 Denise Watts provided an update on the Wellbeing Working Group and advised that the membership included herself, Tim Tempest and Marianne MacDonald. She said the Group's aim was that, regardless of age or income, all people in Tunbridge Wells should be able to flourish. She further added that the Group was seeking other members of the Town Forum to join it.

Marianne MacDonald said that wellbeing was a large area of work and a challenge for the Group in setting up its objectives. She said it was hoped that a health analysis with comparisons to surrounding areas would be produced and used to look at the Group's terms of reference. She added that, one of the aims was for a wellbeing/wellness map to be produced which would include facilities such as public toilets, locations of defibrillators, disabled access etc.

Caroline Auckland said the theme for the Soroptimists of Tunbridge Wells for the current year was mental health and the Group was happy to lend its support.

## **REPORT OF THE WATER IN THE WELLS WORKING GROUP**

- 26A Michael Holman updated members on the work of the Water in the Wells Working Group. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

Mr Holman said the Group had discussed with Royal Tunbridge Wells Together (RTWT) how the Dippers could be resourced and separately, the Council had agreed to fund the Dippers for a two-year summer programme. Mr Holman said that, in the long-term, it was hoped that the Dippers would be part of an ongoing event and could be funded by a bid supported by RTWT.

Mr Holman said that Berkeley Homes would be working to repair the vandalism to the lettering of the Royal Wells Park development 'something in the water' signage.

Mr Holman advised that there were a number of proposals to support the installation of drinking fountains which would be supported by RTWT and an undertaking had been received from South East Water to support pipe infrastructure. He further added that Royal Victoria Place had also suggested similar proposals.

## **REPORT OF THE TRANSPORT STRATEGY WORKING GROUP**

- 26B A written report from the Group had been submitted and was included in the agenda pack. There were no comments from the Town Forum on the report.

## **REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKING GROUP**

- 26C Mark Booker updated members on the efforts of the Strategic Planning Working Group. Mr Booker advised that a further workshop on the Council's local plan had been arranged for the group members by the Planning Policy team. Mr Booker added that the content of the workshop was confidential but it allowed an opportunity for the Town Forum to feed in to the process. Adrian Berendt asked members to respond to Mr Booker with any responses to be included in the Local Plan consultation. Mr Berendt said the Town Forum appreciated the way level of consultation it had been afforded as part of the process.

Councillor Heasman reiterated the importance of retaining the confidential information that had been provided in order to deter developer-led planning.

## **REPORT OF THE CULTURE, LEISURE AND TOURISM WORKING GROUP**

- 26D Linda Lewis update members on the work of the Group. Mrs Lewis said the Group was particularly interested in engaging with young people in Tunbridge Wells and with how they could be involved in a 'Youth' Town Forum. Michael Holman and Adrian Berendt had attended the Model United Nations General Assembly (MUNGA), held at the Town Hall, on separate occasions. Mrs Lewis advised that the event included participation from several local schools and the level of debate had been impressive. She said The MUNGA representatives would be asked if they had an interest in attending a Town Forum meeting with a view to further engagement. Mrs Lewis added that it was very important to engage with young people as a group in the borough and although they may move away later in life, many would return to Tunbridge Wells and there was an opportunity now for them to help shape the



borough.

Marianne Macdonald said that the Skinners Kent Academy, in particular, were involved in the International Bacha Laureate and the Duke of Edinburgh Award – both activities involved a percentage of volunteer hours as part of the curriculum. She added that those students involved were very proactive in this area.

## **REPORT OF THE FINANCE AND OTHER ISSUES WORKING GROUP**

26E            There were no issues raised.

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

27            The following items were raised under any other business:

**Nourish** - Marianne Macdonald updated the Town Forum on the support provided by Nourish in the sixth year of its existence. Mrs Macdonald said that, over the last year, the organisation had been able to provide the equivalent of a meal for every person in Tunbridge Wells. She further added that there were more opportunities for referral and any of the Town Forum members and associated groups could become referral agents.

**Aldi supermarket** – Councillor Woodward advised that press coverage suggesting that Aldi was withdrawing its interest in a store on Eridge road was inaccurate. He said the organisation was looking at two possible sites in the borough including Eridge Road.

**Air pollution** – this was considered to be an important topic and was wider than planning policy. It was suggested that some of the schools on St Johns Road were monitoring the air quality. Members noted that the Council was in the process of producing an Air Quality Action Plan. Which would be incorporated into the Local Plan.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 9.10 pm.