



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Draft Minutes of Meeting, Monday 24 April 2006

Highlights from this meeting:

- TWBC Chief Executive, Sheila Wheeler, demonstrated her continuing commitment to the Town Forum.
- Cllr Scholes committed to assist Stephen Lukacs in his campaign for sports facilities young people.
- Cllr Wakefield reported that Daniel Bech's recent presentation on behalf of the Town Forum on Highway 'grot spots' had resulted in 'more progress at the Joint Transport Board than in the last ten years'.
- KCC Highways are meeting the Town Forum, Soroptimists and Civic Society to discuss town transport policy.

Present

Jenny Alexander (Rusthall Village Association), Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), June Bridgeman (Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells & District), John Cunningham (RTW Civic Society), Betsey Dix (Calverley Park Crescent), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Karen Fisher (Grove Hill Residents' Association), Bruce Goodwin (Grove Hill Residents' Association), Matt Goodwin (Chairman Town Forum / Tunbridge Wells Village Residents' Association), Richard Gould (Calverley Park Crescent), Michael Hicks (Inner London Road Association), John Higgs (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), Simon Joyce (Calverley Park Crescent), Michael Larsen (The Grove Residents' Association), George Lawson (Friends of the Common), Ian Naismith (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), Alton Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Mark Roberts (WA Turner Ltd), Bryan Senior (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Fred Sirman (Warwick Park Area Residents' Association), Patricia Smith (The Goodwins No1/No2 Residents' Company), Christopher Thomas (The Goodwins No1/No2 Residents' Company), Roger Walsh (Stone Street Residents' Association), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association), David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association), Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association), Cllr Cobbold, Cllr Crawford, Cllr Mayhew, Cllr Price, Cllr Scholes, Cllr Wakefield.

In Attendance

Kevin Ashby (No1 BoxingGym), Frances Avery (Civic Society), Ms Lovat (observer Camargue PR), Stephen Lukacs (No1 BoxingGym), Mark Roberts (MD Turners), Brian Senior (Civic Society), Loyd Stone (No1 BoxingGym) - Cllr Bullock (TWBC Cabinet member), Ellie Broughton (TWBC), Sheila Wheeler (TWBC)

1. Apologies

from Graham Bradley, John Goodfellow, Michael Holman, Lorna Prentice, Patrick Shovelton, Grace Thomsett-Hill, Cllr Ekins-Daukes, Cllr Howell.

2. Membership changes

- Chris Weller will be replacing Jane Fenwick as Chairman of Calverley Park Association.
- Stan Dutton, Chair of Clarendon Area Residents' Association, is withdrawing because of other commitments but hopes someone will attend in his place.
- Roger Walsh attended on behalf of Stone Street Residents' Association.

Cllr Crawford introduced four guests: Mark Roberts, Managing Director of Turners, Stephen Lukacs, who has set up a boxing club in Showfields, and two lads from the boxing club (Kevin Ashby and Loyd Stone).

The Chairman welcomed Sheila Wheeler, Chief Executive of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

3. Minutes of the meeting of 27 March 2006

The minutes were approved subject to the following amendment:

- Paragraph 23 to read 'June Bridgeman said that a range of significant issues had emerged for progressing with Kent Highways...'

4. Matters arising from the minutes of the meeting of 27 March 2006

- The Task Force had met (see item 7).
- The 'grot spots' presentation took place (see item 8).
- John Goodfellow represented the Town Forum at the inaugural Business Forum meeting (report at the next meeting)

5. Local Government Review

Sheila Wheeler presented information on:

- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's strategic aims and the current reorganisation of the Council.
- Potential reorganisation of Local Government.

- - - > > See Appendix 1.

This was followed by a Q&A session.

6. Facilities for young people

Stephen Lukacs addressed the Town Forum about his experiences of setting up a boxing club in Showfields, with Cllr Crawford's help, and about the difficulties of establishing facilities for young people. He sought Council and Town Forum support, identifying a particular need for space for ball games in Ramslye and Showfields, stressing the benefits to the wider community and citing evidence that availability of leisure facilities had resulted in reduced anti-social behaviour by youths. Two local lads (Kevin Ashby and Loyd Stone) from the boxing club took questions.

ACTION POINT:

- Cllr Scholes to arrange a meeting to progress Stephen Lukacs' proposals for Members.

7. Town Forum Review Task Force

The Task Force recommendations (*Appendix 2*) were discussed. Further constructive comments on the Task Force's paper should be submitted to Matt Goodwin as soon as possible and the Task Force will submit further detailed proposals on the Direction of the Town Forum to the next meeting.

It was in any event agreed that:

- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will hone down strategic objectives and vision for the town and formally consult, engage with, and seek recommendations from the Town Forum, along with other partners.
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will periodically identify priorities on which it would welcome the Town Forum's 'thought leadership'.
- The Town Forum and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will build mechanisms for Town Forum reports and recommendations to be formally considered by the Council, and for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and other partnership bodies to report progress back formally.
- The Chief Executive is happy to attend the Town Forum from time-to-time and for her officers to attend and provide support as and when necessary
- Ward Councillors should demonstrate their commitment to the Town Forum through their attendance.

- - - > > See Appendix 2.

8. Reports from sub-committees

Brighten up Tunbridge Wells ('grot spot') focus group

Daniel Bech gave feedback from the presentation to the Joint Transport Board (KCC / TWBC) and Cllr Bullock reported that Kent County Council has started work on identifying ownership of 'grot spots' before prioritising and costing remedial work.

Community Plan sub-committee

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Community Plan is due out for scrutiny and has taken on a lot of the Town Forum's points. The sub-committee will be reconstituted to formally consider and respond to the new draft.

9. Short announcements

- Civic Society – Laurence Punnet will be addressing the Civic Society meeting about progress with Pembury Hospital on Thurs 11 May at the Town Hall. All welcome.
- Soroptimists' taxi campaign – the Courier has invited readers to submit letters of support. The Soroptimists are meeting Kent County Council's engineer to walk the site – Cllr Price asked if feedback would be submitted to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Licensing Committee.

10. Dates of future meetings

- Thursday 25 May
- Thursday 22 June
- Thursday 20 July

11. Issues for future meetings

- Museum and Library redevelopment (Caroline Ellis, Museum Manager).
- Crime and disorder issues (Linda Mortley, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council).
- Community Plan (Estelle Grant, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council).
- Commons Conservators.

Summary of Sheila Wheeler's presentation

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council – Strategic Aims

The Council has four main strategic aims for the next three to five years, publicised in a variety of ways including the website, budget consultation and the media:

- Promoting and maintaining a thriving and diverse local economy.
- Caring for our environment.
- Having housing suitable for local people.
- Developing safer and stronger communities.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council – reorganisation

Reorganisation is taking place to redirect resources to secure actions around the strategic aims.

The current structure will be replaced by three new directorates:

- Planning & Development.
- Services to the Community – Environment & Street Scene, Leisure, Housing & Benefits, Revenues.
- Change & Business Support – Customer Access & Support Services (ie Personnel, Legal, Finance etc).

Directors' posts have been advertised with interviews due to take place mid-May. Successful candidates are expected to take up posts by the end of September.

In addition, additional resources are being funded:

- Head of Economic Development
- Head of Planning Services (Strategic Planning and Development Control)
- Community and Corporate Planning Services Manager
- Head of Financial & Property Services

Interviews for these posts will take place at the end of June, with staff in post by early October.

All Tunbridge Wells Borough Council reports are available on the website.

Local Government reorganisation

- Government White Paper expected in June, focussing on six areas:
 - Performance Management
 - Economic growth for cities / city regions
 - Local leadership
 - Convenor of public services
 - Community, neighbourhood empowerment ('double devolution' of power and budgets to neighbourhoods)
 - Local Government Structure – 'to address confused and complicated structures of Local Government'
- The **implications** locally are that instead of the current County and Borough Council structure there might be a unitary authority.
- Unitaries would represent more residents than Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (ie 5000,000 - 6000,000 versus the current 100,000) with office headquarters elsewhere in Kent. There will be fewer elected Councillors overall in Kent, representing more constituents.
- The **timetable** is approximately three years with the possibility of a shadow authority in place in May 2008 and operational from May 2009.
- Local authorities' **responses** vary: some welcome the proposals, others are more reluctant. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's position, along with most other Kent authorities, is to oppose, and propose an alternative model of more integrated partnerships. Maidstone is the only Kent authority supporting the unitary proposal.
- Will there be **public consultation**? SW indicated it was not clear at this stage.

Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum Task Force – initial thoughts on future direction

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council was defined as a weak Council by the Audit Commission following the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2004. The major theme of the inspection findings for the Council was the lack of strategic capacity and leadership. **There had been limited effective interaction and partnership with the community and key stakeholders.**

The recent March 2006 Audit Commission appraisal commented that: 'The CPA report highlighted the absence of community involvement and influence on the Council's direction and weaknesses in strategic leadership. **The Council is addressing its deficiencies, but impact to date has been limited.** The Commission went on 'The Council is proactively encouraging community involvement and engagement in the development and setting of Council priorities'.

Role of the Town Forum

The Town Forum is one of the key features by which Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is seeking to address the Audit Commission criticisms but the role of the Town Forum and the commitment of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to it are inadequately defined. The Town Forum Task Force has been set up to identify problem areas and provide solutions. The initial Task Force meeting has produced the initial thoughts and proposals which are set out in the table below.

Problem	Suggested Solution
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's strategic aims following the recent restructuring are not clearly articulated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheila Wheeler/Melvyn Howell to give full briefing to the Town Forum.
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has not set out explicitly what it is seeking from the Town Forum and has not assisted the Town Forum in this definitional exercise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tunbridge Wells Borough Council should set out explicitly a limited number of issues on which they seek the views and recommendations of the Town Forum.
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Councillors and partner agencies have not provided clear and unequivocal commitment to the Town Forum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Councillors should commit to attend all Town Forum meetings unless they have good reason not to do so. • Tunbridge Wells Borough Council leadership to formally receive and review minutes of Town Forum.
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has not established clear lines of accountability and reporting with the Town Forum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tunbridge Wells Borough Council with Town Forum should agree formal mechanisms for receiving recommendations. • Tunbridge Wells Borough Council should establish formal reporting lines from Councillors/Officers and partner agencies to the Town Forum.
The composition of the Town Forum does not fully reflect the broad concerns of the Town's residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Forum to make contact with other stakeholders (CAB, Age Concern etc) and provide a formal route to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. • Town Forum should take an active role in testing residents' opinions through surveys and other strategies. • Town Forum should, in any event, take a proactive thought leadership role on issues of strategic importance to the Town.
The profile of the Town Forum in the Town is not commensurate with the contribution that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council appears to require.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite attendance of Tunbridge Wells Courier reporters at all Town Forum meetings. • The Town Forum to issue a press release at the end of each meeting, setting out recommendations to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.