



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 24 August 2006

1. Present:

Graham Bell (Pantiles' Traders), Jenny Blackburn (Rusthall Village Association), June Bridgeman (Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Stanley Dutton (Clarendon Road Residents' Association), Bruce Goodwin (Grove Hill Road Residents' Association), Matt Goodwin (Chairman of the Town Forum / Village Residents' Association), Michael Hicks (Inner London Road Residents' Association), John Higgs (Hanover Road and Rock Villa Road Residents' Association), Michael Holman (TW Twinning & Friendship Association), Tony Hull (Upper Grosvenor Road Residents' Association), George Lawson (Friends of the Common), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove Residents' Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Road Residents' Association), Chris Thomas (The Goodwins No.1/No.2 Residents' Companies), Gill Twells (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), TWBC Councillor David Wakefield, Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association), David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association), Christopher Weller (Calverley Park Association), Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association) and Tricia Wright (Calverley Park Association); Cllr Peter Crawford

In attendance:

Jamie Johnson (representing Showfields Boxing Club) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Manager, TWBC).

2. Apologies:

Jenny Alexander (Rusthall Village Association), Daniel Bech (The Telephone House Neighbours' Association) Graham Bradley (Hanover Road and Rock Villa Road Residents' Association), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Betsey Dix, Richard Gould and Simon Joyce (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Ian Naismith (Hanover Road & Rock Villa Road Residents' Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Association), Patrick Shovelton (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Grace Thomsett-Hill (Clarence Road Users' Association); Cllr Roy Bullock, Cllr Catherine Mayhew, Cllr Leonard Price.

3. HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS MEETING

- Community Plan – The Town Forum expressed disappointment that their representations on the review of the Plan appeared to have been ignored by the Partnership. It was agreed that this was a key topic for discussion when TWBC's new Director of Planning & Development (and, later, TWBC's Chief Executive) attended Town Forum meetings.
- Highways issues – The Town Forum felt there would be benefit in holding regular meetings with KCC Highways on Highways matters.
- Sub-committee and other appointments – The Town Forum agreed there was a priority need to appoint active members to a new sub-committee looking at town centre initiatives and to the posts of 'Highways Champion' and 'Press Officer'.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 20 July 2006

The minutes were agreed.

5. Matters arising from the Meeting dated 20 July 2006

- Highways/Transport –
 - (i) Matt Goodwin proposed that regular dialogue be established with Behdad Haratbar, including quarterly meetings. The Chairman added that he would chase Mr Haratbar for a copy of the presentation slides used and the contractors' criteria for the reinstatement of pavements and roads, both of which had been agreed at the previous meeting. John Higgs asked that the minutes record how disappointed he had been with Mr Haratbar's apparent lack of preparation and local knowledge, although he – and others – acknowledged that the normal response times and action of KCC Highways was good;

(ii) Matt Goodwin repeated his plea for a volunteer to act as the Town Forum's 'Highway Champion', adding that he would define the role and circulate details;

(iii) David Wakefield suggested that the performance of KCC Highways, since the transfer of this function from TWBC, would be an appropriate study for the Borough Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee and invited June Bridgeman to discuss it with him in more detail first.

- Press Officer – Matt Goodwin advised that there had been no names coming forward to act as Press Officer for the Town Forum; he added that – as with the Highways Champion – he would define what was required of the role and circulate details, before nominees were sought further.

- TWBC management structure – Town Forum members asked for more detailed information regarding the remits of the new directors and heads of service. Mike McGeary undertook to provide this information, either in advance of, or provided for, the next meeting.

- Open Spaces policy – Matt Goodwin advised that:

- (i) as a result of the Spafest events, he had received a commitment from the Leader of the Council that TWBC would establish an Open Spaces policy;

- (ii) he would speak to the Warden to the Commons Conservators, Steve Budden, and invite him to a future meeting, to discuss how the Conservators would handle a similar situation to the Spafest application.

- Meeting with MP – Matt Goodwin advised that the MP for Tunbridge Wells, Greg Clark, had asked to meet with him, to discuss issues in the town. Matt added that he would update the Town Forum on the outcome.

ACTIONS:

- Chairman to chase Behdad Haratbar for slides and criteria; define roles of 'Highways Champion' and 'Press officer' and circulate; and invite Warden to Commons Conservators to a Town Forum meeting;
- June Bridgeman to discuss possible Overview & Scrutiny review with David Wakefield;
- Mike McGeary to provide more detailed information about new directors and heads of service.

6. TWBC Update

- Showfields Boxing Club – Cllr Peter Crawford and Chris Weller reported on the financial problems being experienced by the Showfields Boxing Club; the Town Forum heard that it required income of £5k per annum to achieve viability. Chris Thomas undertook to investigate further and report back.

- Ritz/ABC Cinema, town centre – The Town Forum was concerned to know what TWBC was doing in respect of the town centre cinema site. John Cunningham summarised what he, on behalf of the Civic Society, had learnt, from speaking direct to the new owner of the site, but there was a general view that TWBC should be taking more of a lead in determining future plans for the site and a realistic timetable for action.

ACTION:

- Chris Thomas to progress the issue of financial support for Showfields Boxing Club.

7. Consultation on TWBC Housing Strategy

Reference was made to this TWBC consultation document and general comment made about the housing situation in Tunbridge Wells, with particular concern expressed about the lack of affordable housing.

ACTIONS:

- The SEERA Sub-Committee (to be re-named) be asked to meet and respond on behalf of the Town Forum Residents' Associations be encouraged to respond direct; and
- David Crosby, Head of Housing Services, be invited to attend the next meeting of the Forum, to discuss the document.

8. New Town Initiatives Sub-Committee

– including overview of potential use of TWBC residual funds of £40m

Matt Goodwin proposed that the Town Forum should establish a sub-committee, to come forward with a number of initiatives to present to TWBC for consideration on improving the town, to include environmentally-friendly energy development.

The meeting was informed that TWBC residual funds of £40m had come from the sale of Council housing, mostly in TW town estates, and should therefore be used primarily for the benefit of the town rather than spread across the Borough. It was also informed that the sum had already been eaten into with a series of small initiatives so it was now down to possibly £32m. The sense of the meeting was that this money offered a unique opportunity for development of one or more major initiatives to foster the future of the town in a planned way and was just the sort of thing on which they ought to offer ideas.

It was suggested that it would be helpful in moving things forward if the new sub-committee, to be chaired by Daniel Bech, could take account of the substantial body of work which the Civic Society had already done in formulating major town proposals. John Cunningham agreed to put together a paper to circulate to the Town Forum within two months. The new Town Forum sub-committee would in any event be established in advance of the Civic Society paper so that Town Forum thinking on this issue could begin as soon as possible.

Mike McGeary felt that there may be some misunderstanding over the availability of resources which the Town Forum believed TWBC had available; he undertook either to invite someone to attend the next meeting to clarify or to determine the current position and report back.

ACTIONS:

- Town Forum members to volunteer to serve on the sub-committee;
- John Cunningham to prepare a paper, with proposals, for the sub-committee to consider;
- Mike McGeary to report back on the availability of appropriate TWBC funds.

9. Tunbridge Wells Community Plan

The Town Forum expressed great disappointment that, from looking at the minutes of the Community Plan Partnership meeting held on 11 August, none of the representations and observations they had made on the review of the Community Plan had been taken into account. Matt Goodwin advised that the new Director of Planning and Development, Robert Cottrill, would be attending the October Town Forum meeting and Sheila Wheeler, TWBC Chief Executive, would be attending the November meeting; he added that he hoped these two meetings would help the Town Forum to make its views known but he stressed that there must be a clear focus in mind for the two meetings.

Matt Goodwin also asked that the Community Plan Sub-Committee continue its work in respect of the Plan, to ensure the views of the Town Forum were known and recognised by the Community Plan Partnership.

10. Consultation on proposed temporary road in Grosvenor Recreation Ground

The Town Forum expressed concern that there had been no consultation over Seeboard's plans to create a temporary road in the Grosvenor Recreation Ground, to enable them to install replacement heavy-duty equipment to their sub-station. There was universal agreement that Seeboard must adhere to their commitment to reinstate the Park once work was complete but that no further Town Forum action was required on this issue.

11. Feedback reports from recent action points and sub-committees

- George Lawson reported on behalf of Daniel Bech on the work of the “**Brighten-up Royal Tunbridge Wells**” Focus Group.

The good news items included:

- (i) Southern Water advising that most of the town's Victorian sewer systems had now been updated;
- (ii) the lamp columns in Chapel Place had been replaced and the existing column would be relocated in Cumberland Walk;
- (iii) one of the long-established 'grot spot' properties in Warwick Park was now on the market;

- (iv) another 'grot spot' property in Inner London Road was being repaired and converted into apartments;
- (v) two steel bike stands had been donated to the town by the City Council of Wiesbaden and were to be placed outside the Town Hall.

On the bad news front, the Town Forum was advised that:

- (i) although the owner of the property in Victoria Road/Albert Road had been prosecuted, the building remained in a very run-down condition;
- (ii) the sundial, presented to the town by our friendship twin of Wiesbaden, had been stolen; and
- (iii) a prominent and substantial property in Church Road, sold by TWBC, had had hoarding erected and painted in an inappropriate colour, despite representations having been made to TWBC.

- Matt Goodwin summarised the outcome of his **meeting with Sheila Wheeler, TWBC Chief Executive**, tabling notes on the key issues discussed and agreed.

12. Chairman's meeting with new directors and elections for Chairman and Deputy Chairman

- It was suggested that the Chairman, in his meetings with key individuals (such as TWBC Chief Executive or new Directors etc) might benefit from being accompanied by one or more Town Forum members. It was agreed that Matt Goodwin would progress this outside the meeting, if people were willing to attend.
- With the appointments of Chairman and Deputy Chairman to be considered at the October meeting, Matt Goodwin asked for nominations to be submitted to Mike McGeary.

13. Dates of future meetings

It was agreed that the meeting scheduled for Thursday 21 December be cancelled, because it was too close to Christmas, which would make it difficult for many members to attend.

14. Any other business

- Matt Goodwin advised that he had arranged a meeting with Tim Pendry who had led the opposition to the Spafest (events) licence application on the Common's Lower Cricket Ground. He added that he felt that the Town Forum might be able to benefit from Mr Pendry's experience of many years in the PR and media world.
- John Cunningham tabled details of this year's Heritage Open Days and sought volunteers to assist with the distribution of leaflets, publicising the event.
- June Bridgeman advised that another consultation process was being followed by TWBC, namely on its taxi policy.
- June also reported that she was holding a meeting to establish the level of support for a 'Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery' and invited interested parties to contact her.
- Cllr Peter Crawford advised that, after a great deal of effort, tenants had finally been found for the two shop units at Roper's Gate on Ramslye.