



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 24 September 2009

1. Present:

Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Graham Bell (Pantiles Traders' Association), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association), John Higgs (Hanover and Rock Villa Residents' Association), Stuart Anderson (Beulah Road Residents' Association), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Ian Naismith (Hanover and Rock Villa Residents' Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Peter Perry (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Users Association), Simon Smith (Inner London Road Residents Association), Christopher Thomas (The Chairman of the Town Forum and The Goodwins No's 1 & 2 Residents' Company/Woodbury Close Residents' Association), Alastair Tod and John Cunningham (RTW Civic Society); and Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association).

RTW Ward Councillors: Ronen Basu (Culverden); Peter Crawford (Vice-Chairman, Broadwater), John Miller (Culverden); James Scholes (Pantiles & St Marks) and Frank Williams (Sherwood).

Others in attendance: Councillor Roy Bullock (Leader of the Council) and Cheryl Clark (Committee Administrator).

2. Apologies:

Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove); Betsey Dix (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association); John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association); David Webster (Clarence Road Users Association); RTW Ward Councillors Robert Atwood (Rusthall), Barry Edwards (Rusthall), Mrs Lesley Herriot (St John's), Mrs Catherine Mayhew (Park) and Leonard Price (Culverden)

(Christopher Thomas in the Chair for the duration of the meeting)

3. Membership Changes

No membership changes were reported.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 30 July 2009

The minutes were agreed, subject to the following amendment:

- Amendment to minute 8 'Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association', third paragraph up from the bottom, last sentence should read:
'The Association suggested that the 44 ton vehicles be prohibited.'
- Amendment to minute 8 'Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association', Add Action table to read the following: (requested by Peter Perry)

<p>Action:</p> <p>8.1 That the Chairman of the Town Forum write to the Borough Engineer seeking an update on the pedestrian crossing at Carrs Corner, Crescent Road.</p>

Matters Arising:

5. Actions from Previous Meetings

ON GOING ACTION

That all representatives from **any association/member to provide details of activities** that they had undertaken and/or want to promote to Daniel Bech in order for them to be included on the Town Forum's website so that all members could know what was happening. This is particularly important so as to avoid duplication of activity and to show a single voice for Councillors to deal with.

The Chairman, Christopher Thomas, reiterated the fact that if any association/member wishes other Town Forum members to be aware of their organisation's activities, they need to inform Daniel Bech in order for them to be included on the Town Forum's website. All representatives are reminded to inform the Town Forum of concerns held by residents, who may not be represented on the Town Forum, but wish for a platform to raise such concerns.

Actions Outstanding from the Meeting dated 30 July 2009

- 6.1 Leonard Price (Culverden Ward) to inform Daniel Bech regarding answers to questions relating to the Cinema site and RTW Conservation Area at Risk (English Heritage Register 2009).

Actions Completed from the Meeting dated 30 July 2009

- 9.1 That the Town Forum put together two presentation packages regarding: Highway issues and also Street Scene/Clutter issues.
- 9.2 That Councillor Bullock arrange a meeting between Borough and County officers to present the Town Forum's concerns of the numerous highway issues (to be held 4 November 2009).
- 9.3 That Cllr Bullock to arrange a further meeting to discuss environmental issues under the responsibility of the Borough Council i.e bins/graffiti/street clutter. (held 23 September 2009). Update provided below by Daniel Bech).
- 10.1 In respect of the planned pedestrian safety measures – A267 Frant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells. The Chairman confirmed that he had written within the consultation deadline provided of 14 August 2009 provided and received a response from Michael Sammut at KHS as follows:
- A funding bid to install an interactive speed sign on the A267 Frant Road, within 150 metres of the start of 30mph limit in the Tunbridge Wells bound direction had been successful;
 - The pedestrian island was a minimum of 3.0m wide and would therefore adequately accommodate/allow a person pushing a pram or wheelchair;
 - The associated signage would be a non-metallic composite material;
 - The pedestrian island and traffic island would be up to current design standards, include the standard reflective 'keep left' bollards and the pedestrian island would include the standard high level belisha beacon. As both islands were within a central cross hatched area of the road there was no requirement to include the otherwise necessary solid white line around the islands.

However, a further request put forward by Christopher remains to be confirmed:

- The set up of a road speed camera indicator sign on the new 30mph sign was being considered separately by the Kent & Medway Safety Camera Partnership and a further update would follow in respect of their decision.

6. Reports from Borough Councillors / RTW Ward Councillors

Councillor Bullock – Gave apologies for his late arrival. He updated the Town Forum on concerns over the current economic climate, central Government debt and the adverse affect this was likely to have on local authority funding. He advised that TWBC already needed to make savings of £800k in each of the next three years to meet the current deficits and would be unable to continue the full range of services currently being provided. Consequently TWBC would need to consider alternative ways of working, for example in partnership with other authorities or organisations. They would also need to consider difficult decisions in relation to cuts in discretionary services and/or organisational capacity, which fell outside the Council's basic statutory duties. He advised that the Town Forum would need to prepare to be more proactive, self-sufficient and less reliant on Council administrative support and funding.

In respect of Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom, he advised that he expected there would still be an element of funding for next year but stressed that there was a need for residents associations and businesses to take on greater civic responsibility and funding.

The Chairman invited comment from Town Forum members. Daniel Bech agreed with Councillor Bullock that residents were too complacent and did not have enough pride in keeping their street tidy. Following his meeting with Cllr Bullock and TWBC officers to discuss the street scene, he understood that TWBC needed legal backup to prosecute offenders but the Town Forum might take it upon themselves to write letters to residents asking them to take remedial action on their properties. He suggested that TWBC might fund land registry enquiries to ascertain the owner/landlord of properties where unknown, which could then assist the Town Forum in identifying who the correct person was to write to.

The Chairman supported Daniel Bech's suggested action as he was keen to address the problem of decaying and neglected properties. However he was concerned as to what the legal status was regarding such letters being sent and that the Town Forum must have qualified support from the Council in what the letters were saying. Presently, the Town Forum is not a statutory body and therefore the Council must confirm what support would be given.

Councillor Bullock suggested awaiting the outcome of further discussions. He was aware that the problems of untidy streets had to some extent been exacerbated by the proliferation of domestic rubbish and recycling boxes and thought that officers needed to review how this might be managed. He also thought officers might use resources such as the 'mosaic' software to try and ascertain why some neighbourhoods of similar property types were worse than others.

He suggested that these matters be pursued before the Town Forum started sending individual letters. He also thought that the Tunbridge Wells in Bloom project might encourage more responsible behaviour in respect of the street scene due to peer pressure. In respect of proposed s215 action on a particular property, Trevor Gasson, Interim Director of Planning and Development considered that there was insufficient evidence to pursue this option. Simon Smith expressed his astonishment at this response and requested clarification.

Action:

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| 6.1 | That TWBC officers be asked to investigate and suggest solutions in respect of excess recycling bins and why some streets appeared to be worse than others, and respond to Daniel Bech's presentation on this and other street scene related problems. |
| 6.2 | That the Interim Director of Planning and Development (Trevor Gasson) be asked to clarify why there was insufficient evidence for the Council to issue a s215 notice in respect of a particular property (Summerhill House, 73 London Road). |

Councillor Williams – At the request of the Chairman, Councillor Williams outlined his responsibilities under his Portfolio – Policies and Partnerships. He explained that he was newly promoted to Cabinet and welcomed the subject of his portfolio as it was a very interesting role which touched on most areas in some way or another. Some principal matters in which he was keen to be involved were:

- Consultation with stakeholders;
- Communication
(he felt that TWBC did not sufficiently publicise their achievements regarding communication)
- Equalities – new bill due to be passed through parliament;
- Disabilities;
- Community Safety
- Development of Partnerships

7. Reports from Champions/Vision Committee

Vision and Arts Committee – see: Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom (2010)

Community Champion – see: Royal Tunbridge Wells Conservation Area at Risk

Planning Matters – No matters arising.

Green Issues – Kate Sergeant advised of the launch of The Tunbridge Wells Garden Share Scheme and requested that it be promoted by Town Forum members. She distributed leaflets at the meeting.

Transport and Health Matters – No matters arising

8. RTW Conservation Area at Risk

Daniel Bech advised that he had met with Councillor Bullock and TWBC officers as agreed and as already noted in the minutes above.

There were 14 matters discussed as set out below and a hardcopy of the subject titles was circulated at the meeting as a reminder to Members of the Town Forum.

Full details were available on the Town Forum's website:

www.townforum.org.uk/community/twbc-rtwtfmeeting230909-slides.pdf

RTW Conservation Area at Risk:

1. Empty, derelict and detracting buildings in prominent locations
2. Empty shops
3. Front gardens, change of street scene, untidy fronts
4. Facades, plastic windows etc, inappropriate colour schemes
5. Untidy buildings and barracks in prominent locations
6. Precinct, roundabouts
7. Brick pavements, setting of street furniture
8. Street clutter, railings, street manual
9. Bins, recycling boxes
10. Satellite dishes
11. Estate agent signs, A-boards, leftover construction signs
12. Parking on pavement
13. Dog fouling, pigeon pest, restaurant ventilation
14. Bicycle ways

Daniel Bech confirmed that a further meeting was due to be held in due course.

On the subject of roundabouts, Peter Perry indicated that he understood there was some opposition to sponsorship and thought this was a good solution to encourage better maintenance. He also thought this might be a source of income to Tunbridge Wells but the Chairman explained that as highways responsibilities are with Kent Highways those monies would pass to KCC rather than TWBC. He added that in his view advertising was a potential distraction to drivers. Daniel Bech objected to the yellow signs that he had observed and thought it was much better done in other countries. A suggestion of growing vegetable on roundabouts was dismissed on the basis of the difficulties and dangers of access.

As mentioned in earlier discussions action points are shown as items 6.1 and 6.2 above.

9. The Steps in Calverley Grounds

The Chairman summarised the concerns of the Town Forum over the lack of consultation, costs and the resulting large structure in such a prominent position in the Calverley Grounds. In response to the Chairman's email, Councillor Williams had responded, although he was not able to confirm the final costs at this stage.

He advised that the steps were now looking better than at earlier stages in their construction and would improve further when the capping stones were in place and once surrounding bare areas were re-seeded and the landscaping was completed. The surface would also weather in time. He explained that the increased width of these steps over the previous structure was to address issues of access for the less mobile and otherwise facilitate people passing and public safety during events with large numbers of people.

He continued to explain that the works were part of the wider changes to the Grounds including the changes to the location and surfaces of the paths. These had been authorised as a delegated decision by an officer who had since left the Council's employment. Consequently, no explanation could be provided on the lack of consultation or communication on the works undertaken.

Councillor Bullock added that much of the work undertaken might have been necessary to comply with the Disability and Discrimination Act (DDA) and suggested that the Town Forum might be interested in asking the Access Group to speak at one of their meetings.

The Chairman asked for comments or questions from members of the Town Forum. Alastair Tod asked whether English Heritage had been consulted or had consented to the works and Councillor Williams undertook to find out.

Daniel Bech felt that there should not be so many tarmac footpaths and cycle tracks in the Town's parks and they should be kept green. He advised that the path surfaces in Dunorlan path used to be permeable and he did not like the new asphalted surfaces. He felt that the steps in the Calverley Grounds were so large that they could have accommodated a new bandstand.

He suggested that grasscrete would be suitable for modern wheelchairs. Another suggestion was for gravel paths. Councillor Crawford advised that he could get about on gravel but Mary Wardrop felt that it was very difficult to push a wheelchair over that type of surface. Mary Wardrop also commented on the inappropriate timing of works to parks during the summer months when school children were on holiday. There were risks to children playing when heavy machinery was in use, and the dryness and dust exacerbated the symptoms of asthma sufferers.

Jane Fenwick felt that steps in the Calverley Grounds would mellow over time but she thought the money might have been better spent on the Bandstand. She was concerned over the lack of consultation and delegated decisions affecting open spaces. She also noted that there were no 'Friends' of the Calverley Grounds.

The Chairman enquired whether specific grants were received for DDA compliance but Councillor Bullock advised not and that the Government would probably argue that allowance was made in the overall grant provided to local authorities. In the case of the Calverley Grounds, however, funds for the work had come out of 'reserves' as would a number of other projects such as DDA

compliance for the museum. There was further comment and discussion over the extent of DDA works and Councillor Bullock confirmed the necessity of their provision and the obligations of the Council to help improve the standards of life for all.

Further on the subject of paving, the Chairman commented on the tarmac used on Mount Ephraim and was concerned that by using tarmac in parks, where many more trees grew, that problems would occur identical to those on Mt Ephraim. He said time would tell.

10. Any Other Business

Information drums - Daniel Bech raised another subject in respect of the 'information drums' that were located around the town. He had ascertained that these drums were hollow and as they needed to be updated, he proposed the idea that they could be connected by means of 'wifi' and might contain a digital display, which could be kept up to date by remote means. He had recently attended a meeting of the Stronger Communities sub-group of the LSP (Local Strategic Partnership) and they were interested in the idea. Councillor Bullock also advised that TWBC were considering a number of options including 'wifi' and their use for advertising.

Review of Gateway – Mary Wardrop confirmed she was still at the information gathering stage. She had spoken to Councillor Mrs Mayhew and together with Alastair Tod was due to meet with Denise Shortall (Gateway Manager).

Summer Play activities for Children – Mary Wardrop commented on the success of these activities in the areas around Tunbridge Wells and in the Calverley Grounds and praised the hard work and commitment of the officers and their teams who were involved.

Safety Partnership – Mary Wardrop also advised that Mick Wright (Kent Police Neighbourhood Watch Liaison Officer) had reported the successful response with over 700 replies on a local Neighbourhood Watch matter.

Civic Society – John Cunningham announced a number of matters in commemoration of the Town's Royal Centenary. Firstly a ceremony would be held at 5.45pm on 25 September 2009 to unveil a 'Panorama', which indicated the major buildings that could be viewed from the Common. Also he advised of two books due to be published, one about Tunbridge Wells in WW2 and the second containing historic panoramas of Tunbridge details of which could be obtained in due course from their website.

Daniel Bech advised that he liked the design of the Panorama (web-editor's note: *present design is different to the original planning application*) but expressed concern that trees might be felled to improve the view. Alastair Tod repeated previous assurances that there was no intention to fell any trees on the Common. John Cunningham advised that ownership of the Panorama would pass to TWBC for ongoing maintenance and Councillor Bullock thanked the Civic Society for their donation (web-editor's note: *contributions to the project were from the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Civic Society, Friends of the Commons, Lord of the Manor [Targetfollow], Axa PPP*).

Alastair Tod also advised that the East Peckham Silver Band would be performing beside the bandstand in Calverley Grounds at 2.30 on Sunday 27 September.

Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom – The Chairman mentioned that resident associations and schools were to be encouraged to become involved. Peter Perry suggested involving businesses but the Chairman advised that previous attempts had not proved very successful as although there was often local interest, the decision often sat with Head Offices. Councillor Scholes had previously donated a cup in a prior 'TW in Bloom' event. This cup was subsequently lost so a replacement was provided, however, as the original cup was found again he confirmed that he had two cups for use. Cllr Scholes also indicated that his wife had also previously been involved in the organisational side and might be persuaded to take part again if asked. Councillor Bullock suggested that the Town Forum write out to members and the Chairman confirmed that although the website actively encouraged participation, he would certainly do so and contact Mrs Scholes as well.

Action:

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| 10.1 | Chairman to write to Town Forum membership to promote participation or commit financial support to 'Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom' |
| 10.2 | All Town Forum members to actively promote Bloom to their associations and residents within their area. It is requested that details of those associations/residents interested should be given to the Bloom Committee. |

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending and the meeting came to a close at 8.00pm.

11. Dates of next meetings of the Town Forum

- 29 October 2009 at 6.30pm – Commons Conservators in attendance, Rodney Stone (Clerk), Ian Marshall (Freehold Tenant) and Steve Budden (Warden).
- 26 November 2009 at 6.30pm – Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust in attendance, Frank Sims
- 17 December 2009 at 6.30pm – provisional

2010

- 28 January 2010 at 6.30pm
- 25 February 2010 at 6.30pm
- 25 March 2010 at 6.30pm
- 22 April 2010 at 6.30pm
- 27 May 2010 at 6.30pm
- 24 June 2010 at 6.30pm
- 29 July 2010 at 6.30pm
- 30 September 2010 at 6.30pm
- 28 October 2010 at 6.30pm
- 25 November 2010 at 6.30pm
- 16 December 2010 meeting – provisional, there is a possibility of holding this meeting in a different venue and at a different time.

29 October 2009 is the next full Town Forum - Any reports/short papers to be emailed/posted to Samantha Timms by no later than 10am on Monday 12 October 2009.

Notes:

(RTW Town Forum starts at 6:30pm)

1. Councillor Bullock arrived just after the start of the meeting at 6.35pm;
2. Councillor Miller arrived during the reports from Councillors at 7.00pm;
3. Councillor Scholes arrived during minute 9 at 7.20pm;
4. Michael Doyle arrived during minute 9 at 7.25pm;
5. John Cunningham arrived during minute 9 at 7.30pm.