



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

**Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 25 May 2023 held
at the Tunbridge Wells Borough Town Hall, Council Chambers, starting at 6pm**

1. ATTENDANCE

Member Organisations

Dave Barnett (Friends of Grosvenor & Hilbert Park); Adrian Berendt (Royal Tunbridge Wells Bike User Group); Lorna Blackmore (Grantley Court Residents' Association); Mark Brooker (Culverden Residents' Association); Ruth Chambers (Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum); Tim Colley (Stone Street Residents' Association); John de Lucy (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society and Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery); Marieke de Jonge (Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth); Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association); Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents Association); Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association); Mandy Flashman-Wells (Tunbridge Wells Fair Trade Town Group); Marianne MacDonald (Sherborne Close Housing Association); Graham McNeilly (Rotary Club of Tunbridge Wells); David Scott (Residents' Association 1887/The Potteries); Don Sloan (Chair and Molyneaux Park Residents' Association); Tim Tempest (Friends of The Grove and The Avenues Residents Association); Mike Trudel (Friends of the Amelia Scott); Neill Williams (Warwick Park Area Residents' Association); Carol Wilson (Inner London Road Residents' Association).

Councillor Members

Culverden Ward: Cllr Martin Brice and Cllr Justine Rutland); St John's Ward: Cllr Marguerita Morton.

Others in Attendance

Borough Council Officers: Karin Grey (Sustainability Manager) Carlos Hone (Head of Planning); Sarah-Louise Koessler (Marketing and Administration Assistant); Hilary Smith (Economic Development Manager); Mark Straffelli.

Apologies Member Organisations: Stuart Anderson and Chris Morris (Beulah Road Residents' Association); Sue Bishop (Boyne Park Residents Association); David Bushell (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery); Dawn Stanford (Nourish Community Foodbank); Caroline Auckland (Soroptimists Tunbridge Wells); Mike Lees (Tunbridge Wells Civic Society); Matt Brown (Tunbridge Wells Puppetry Festival).

Apologies Councillors: TWBC Councillors: Cllr Victoria White (Park Ward) and Cllr: Rob Wormington (St James Ward) and Kent County Councillor Cllr Becki Bruneau.

1. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

- No changes of representation
- No new membership applications

2. MINUTES OF MEETING 30TH MARCH 2023

- Approved as a correct record
- Matters arising: None

3. UPDATES FROM MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

- Tunbridge Wells Old People's Forum – Have produced a survey: Giving a Voice to People in Later life. Survey of views from Covid-19. Opening quote: "Nobody understands the needs of the elderly until they are old themselves". Copies are available from Ruth Chambers and on the TF website.
- Mike Lees from the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society has presented a paper on engagement and consultation, included within the Agenda Papers distributed.
- David Scott from the 1887 Pantiles Residents Association has provided some photographs of the Chalybeate Spring which opened just in time for the Coronation. Included in the Agenda Papers distributed.

4. TUNBRIDGE WELLS VISITOR ECONOMY

Presentation from Hilary Smith (TWBC Economic Development Manager) and Sarah-Louise Koessler (Marketing and Communications Assistant). Sarah-Louise Koessler summarised the attractions in our Borough with visitor groups identified as social contemporary buzz seekers, green spacers and historians.

Visitor information – The Centre has moved to the Amelia Scott with a presence in the Pantiles via leaflets ins, with a leaflet in the Corn Exchange Arcade, also in all hotels and key retailers and cafes. Seeking more official tourist information points, such as Royal Victoria Place and Chalybeate Spring (these also note where the toilets are located). Supplemented by regularly updated online presence via visitTunbridgeWells website and social media focused more on the younger social and contemporary audience. Previewed the new mini-guide with 150K copies distributed across Kent, Sussex, Kent, Surrey, South London and ports.

Visitor economy – Figures for 2021: 3.6 million visitors, at a value of £191m; 44.4% increase in trips (post-Covid), 47.1% increase in value, 23.4% increase in jobs. Some 39% of overall visitors are visiting friends and relatives, which is high. Further information available in presentation.

Promotional activities completed – Two short films, one focused on the Borough (family-focused) and one a day in Tunbridge Wells (younger audience), poster campaign from June at London train stations, new Instagram page called LoveLocal_TW to promote business across all sectors, various tourist organisation events held/attended, will have a presence at Pub in the Park as many attendees are out of town, working collaboratively with different organisations,

such as BID, Visit Kent and Visit Britain, and undertook small campaigns around Small Business Saturday and International Women's Day (videos available via TWBC website and Youtube).

Ongoing goals – To build collaborative relationships, set up official tourist information points across Borough and build awareness with younger audience of travellers and other international travel organisations.

Action – Social media: Request made of any Town Forum members on social media to follow the Tourism Team and share photos and tag as an advocate of the Town.

Questions/comments

How many visitor numbers relate to town not Borough, e.g. Sissinghurst and Scotney Castle?

Can't say exactly but Tunbridge Wells is a big draw. Figures come from an external economic model and copies of the full report are available.

How do we compare with competitors?

Each district or Borough has its own report and there is a Kent-wide one.

Wiesbaden has a very effective model and the Twinning Association would be more than happy to help.

The team has already met with someone from the Twinning Association.

Comment that sport is missing on the promotional activities and this is a potential opportunity, particularly with cricket.

Sport is featured on the website and promoting the cricket ground, squash club etc. Potential to have the cricket ground feature as a hidden gem video as it attracts Indian visitors because Indian cricket took off in 1983 at the Neville ground (features in the film 1983 on Netflix). Cllr Justine Rutland commented that the suggestion that Kent Cricket return to the Neville was a good thought to take away.

A query over finance and funding and if BID are contributing.

The films were funded through the Government's Welcome Back Fund to the district and there is funding through the UK Prosperity Funding that can be spent on the marketing plan for the Borough. The BID collaboration may also be a source of funding with mutual goals.

Scope to link with activities for older people in the Borough and the suggestion was made that some of the empty shops are used for posters for things to do?

Agreed there is potential for this and also estate agents' windows.

Query over potential for visitor gifts such as fridge magnets.

This has been raised before regarding the potential for have a shop selling Tunbridge Wells gifts and information provision.

5. TOWN CENTRE PLAN 'TRANSPORT AND CARBON BASELINE REPORT'

Presentation from Carlos Hone, TWBC Head of Planning. TWBC commissioned LDA Design, Knight Frank and City Science to develop a town centre study on active travel etc. This reviews national and local policy, cases studies and best practice and provides baseline data on: air quality, walking and cycling, other active travel, bus network, rail, highway and parking and carbon emissions. Presentation available.

Air quality – Change in air AQMA boundaries, new AQMA levels. Centre of the town still below national standards for NO₂ and the PM₁₀ concentrations for air borne particulate matter from car usage but can be improved.

Walking and cycling – Distance from walking in the town centre, 5 minutes from central areas, 15 minutes from outer in the study area so easy to get train station on foot. National cycleways – one of the main routes is along the A26 but the route is busy with traffic. Other cycle networks are somewhat fragmented and do not always come into the town centre.

Highway and parking – Parking is plentiful in the town centre and some other private car parks. Congestion is a main issue that needs to be looked at.

Bus services – Borough served by 12 different bus companies, mainly Arriva and Southern Counties. Links further afield to outskirts and longer distances to Sevenoaks, Maidstone and Brighton.

Carbon emissions – Decarbonisation is progressing in the town centre: in almost every instance there has been a reduction in CO₂ since 2018, e.g. main domestic emissions (accounts for 64% of emissions).

SWOT Analysis Transport and Movement:

- Strengths – pleasant walking environment in Core and Pantiles; green space; low speed limits; good rail connectivity; successful car club; frequent Bus Services to key locations
- Weaknesses – Cycling infrastructure, traffic pedestrian separation, congestion, car dominance, coach/bus layover parking, gradient, rural bus routes, low cost parking, EV charging levels, air quality, public realm quality in places
- Opportunities – Active travel; e-Bikes; EV charging expansion; peak hour spreading; potential P&R site; LCWIP routes; bus fares; Mount Pleasant Road environment; collaboration between stakeholders
- Threats – Bus service post-Covid; reallocation of road space for bus/cycle/ pedestrians; increased travel demand; delivery vehicles; rat Running; car ownership levels; funding of projects.

SWOT Analysis Carbon Emission and decarbonisation

- Strengths – Carbon emissions reduction from all sources, below national average per capita transport emissions

- Weaknesses – Gas heating dependence, reliance on private car
- Opportunities – renewable heating potential, rooftop solar PV potential, modal shift potential
- Threats – Increased demand.

In response to this, the Town Centre plan can try to increase town centre living/ commercial/leisure/cultural /employment, improve the public realm and connectivity, cycle and pedestrian infrastructure (LCWIP projects), improve energy efficiency, develop pedestrian priority schemes to improve walking environments, support economic developments and development-related improvements.

Questions/comments

A lot of what is in there is what has been in Town Forum papers over the years.

With innumerable options how are these to be prioritised and over what time period?

Encouraging to see that CO₂ emissions are going in the right direction and they have been since 2011. The plan is dependent upon, for example, landowners doing building in the town centre. A lot of the land is associated with the Highways Authority and a lot of the connectivity is limited by that as this is a very focused plan not a Borough-wide plan and will be dependent on funding from elsewhere.

Query over buses and the loss of the bus garage and fewer parking places for vulnerable or friends/family visitors.

The need for layover potential for buses has been identified and a bus study is being planned. There is also a need for a parking strategy that will be car parks and on street.

Which are the three key visions over the next 5 years?

Maintaining a good economic vibrancy in the town centre and more local housing (150-200 new dwellings) and making walking and cycling improvements

Current building is focused on people of a certain age is there anything being done for more affordable housing?

Important to have a mix. There is a need for older people accommodation and to have affordable housing and trying hard to make affordable housing around the borough and we try hard to make it deliverable around the town. Government has not changed how it calculates housing needs and this will only be reviewed once the Census data is out in a couple of years. For the town centre plan it is very constrained in terms of open sites. The developments will be denser with multiple height developments but to make sure the scale of the developments is appropriate an environment study would need to be done. Allowing people balconies and greening is important but the town has lots of green areas that are easily walkable.

What we have seen with Water in the Wells for example is that early intervention works. Am I right in thinking only 12% of people are in the older age group (65 and over in the town centre vs 18.6% in England and 19.4% in the Borough overall?

The town is very vibrant and want it to be attractive across the board so we don't want to focus on just one demographic. (Data available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/population/age/resident-age-3a/aged-65-years-and-over?msoa=E02005169>)

Grantly Court junction you get carbon and exhaust emission as the junction is permanently blocked and a yellow box has been requested, what is being done? Can look at the main routes in and the carbon emissions and the AQMA and it is improving – but it is a matter for the Highways Authority.

6. PROGRESS BY TWBC TOWARDS CARBON NEUTRALITY

Presentation from Karin Grey – TWBC Sustainability Manager. Work divided into corporate plan for Council's own estate with a Corporate Carbon Descent plan since 2021, starting to move into the third year of this plan and a Borough-wide climate change strategy that is at draft stage. Also a corporate emissions plan with a greenhouse gas assessment and has seen a 21% reduction from 2018/19 to 2021/22. Grant funding – property improvements ongoing £1.4m Weald and Depot in funding. Some funding set aside for assessments. Also implemented a Carbon Impact Assessment toolkit that all officers have to do which includes Solar Together Kent: Borough-wide initiative to a group purchasing scheme – some 430 properties have signed up with 130 installations done; Climate Action website updated with resources and community stories; Pesticides and herbicide policy to reduce chemical use in parks and green spaces; phased sustainable procurement policy, staff carbon literacy training, participation in the Great Big Green Week among others; Car Club has expanded to 8 cars and will continue to expand as opportunities arise. Presentation available.

Borough-wide strategy is in draft. Drastic emission changes are needed if we want to get carbon neutrality by 2050. Domestic emissions account for 45%, , transport 35%. There are 7 themes across the borough: waste, building and energy efficiency, communities and engagement, natural environment, transport, adaptation and renewable energy generation. These will be the ones that we will be taking forward for the joint strategy. In March we became part of the UK 100 of leaders to ensure that we lobby Government on strategies for carbon change.

Questions/comments

More information on the Care Club locations requested and a comment that the 1887 sires has a space for a club car.

These are Amherst Road, Quarry Road, Goods Station Road, Mount Ephraim, Civic Way, Mount Pleasant Road Avenue, Grove Hill Road and Warwick Park.

Query over collaboration with KCC as TWBC has set a target for net zero by 2035 but KCC is 2050 and how cope with these differences county-wide?

Work with KCC County wide is 2050 but TWBC is aspirational for 2030, but likelihood that this will merge in 2040.

Comment that the website does not give local example of solar panel installation to encourage people to sign up.

Can host local stories if a household but there are staffing changes that has meant no one has been able to do this.

7. COMMUNITY ENERGY AND OTHER ACTIONS

Presentation from Marieke de Jonge: Friends of the Earth (FOE) Tunbridge Wells. FOE is looking into this and hopefully getting a work group together. The household is the biggest contributor to carbon emissions and energy costs are so high so it's important to get involved as the borough has the aim of being carbon neutral by 2030. The first stage is learning about the process and held events in 2019 and 2022 that provided insight and confirmed the need for a dedicated working group. There are examples where people have developed into a professional group and they are paid so we have been given some advice from Community Energy South and Kent Community Energy. Community Energy South are an umbrella organisation and their view is about people coming together to reduce energy use etc. They have levelling up funds available and councils need to be made available (including lottery money). Cited examples such as Communiheat and Repower Balcombe.

The next phase is to get a group of people together to look at renewable power. We have looked at Power for People, a lobbying group, which is looking at a change to the local energy bill where local people generating power can sell to other residents, rather than sell back to energy businesses for them to sell back to other local people. Aiming for a new public meeting with two main goals: Greg Clark support for local Electricity Bill and to generate interest in setting up a community energy scheme for the Tunbridge Wells area.

Questions/comments

For a community energy scheme in Tunbridge Wells, how broad would it be?

That is the task of the work group to see how much interest there is and how many people would want to sign up. We are more the facilitator but we don't have the expertise to set up a community energy scheme ourselves.

Do you envisage locals being able to generate electricity for their neighbour e.g., EV points?

Yes we do but there are no schemes set up and running in Kent.

8. UPDATE FROM THE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cllr Justine Rutland, Councillor Culverden Ward, gave an update. Working with Kent County Council on a newly launched Better Streets consultation on St John's and St James, which will have a survey and leaflet drops and pop-ups. Also looking at a Town Centre cycle route to Langton Green and Rusthall with funding from Central Government and start date at end of June. The High Street with a Traffic Reg Order and the one way system will stay in place – will run to September and the Council will work with BID to improve planters and work to improve the scheme. Highways – Alex Green from BID and Hilary and Julie Cook will walk round the town to

see what can be improved. BID has also paid for new planters at Five Ways. The Literary Festival was very successful with 5,000 attendees, up from 1,600 in 2022 and across 5 rather than 3 venues. The first Comicon was very successful, particularly with young people. Borough-wide residents survey will run from June 12th for 6 weeks. There will be drop in options and letter drops to 10K and will be publicised with Local. Farmers Market hopefully will be up and running in October.

Have had a boundary review and the ward boundaries changing with councillors dropping from 48 to 39 across 14 wards. Full information available at: <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/tunbridge-wells>. Post-election: Ben and Nancy remain in the same position, Hugo takes over planning, Wendy is Health, Leisure and Culture passed to Justine a part of Development portfolio. Two new councillors and Ellen Neville will take on Environmental and Jane Sharatt will be Sustainability. New mayor is Cllr Hugh Patterson with Deputy Cllr Nick Pope.

Questions/comments

FOE went round with the KCC officer two years ago to discuss where trees could be planted is there an opportunity to follow up with that?

Town Centre plan is very big on greening the town so that is part of the policy. Contact Dave Scully to inform him that this was discussed with KCC as it something that could be done in collaboration with BID as they are interested in this.

Has the Ford garage on Mount Ephraim got planning permission to move to the John Lewis site? And what comes to Mount Ephraim?

Yes. Mount Ephraim has been scheduled for a residential site, but not older person specific with some greening or the public realm. The policy is to support affordable housing on those type of sites.

Where will the Farmer's market be located?

It will start with Calverley precinct, move to the clock tower and then move in front of the Town Hall. Aim is to be Sunday and make it a larger pavement market.

9. REPORTS FROM THE TOWN FORUM WORKING GROUPS

a. Transport Strategy Working Group

Have not met since the last meeting but will be meeting in June. Anyone keen to talk about transport is welcome to come along. The £2 bus fare scheme is to be extended. We will comment on the transport plan when we get it. There are going to be two bike rides from Tunbridge Wells station to Southborough Common to demonstrate the level of interest to have a bike route along the A26.

b. Water in the Wells Working Group

A bottle filling station is now in the Grove. The Parks Department will be cleaning the fountain in Dunorlan and hopefully working by the summer. The toilets in every park where there is a water feature are to be open, St John's is supposed to be opening soon – they are boarded up because of vandalism. The Arriva garage development and the

Cinema site are both detailed to have water features but no update on progress. The Chalybeate Spring has now opened, it is Chalybeate water stored on site and through an electronic process the iron content is reduced by 50% being marketed as Tunbridge Wells water as spring water. The fountain is recirculating Chalybeate water. Mr Danby has spent close to £100K on this

c. Strategic planning Working Group

d. Culture, Leisure and Tourism Working Group

e. Wellbeing Working Group

No comments/updates from the other Working Groups.

10. URGENT BUSINESS OR TOPICS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Thank you from Don Sloan to the speakers for giving up their time for this meeting.

11. FUTURE MEETINGS

July 13th 2023. Have several topics scheduled for discussion already.