



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 26 March 2015

Attended: Cllr Bob Backhouse, Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, June Bridgeman, Cllr Peter Bulman, Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Alex Green, Michaela van Halewyn, Tim Harper, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Sue Kaner, Bill Kern, Kyrios Kyriacou, Chris Morris, Marguerita Morton, Angela Phillips (sub), Nick Pope, Martin Prentice (sub), Cllr David Scott, Anne Stobo, David Wakefield (sub), Mary Wardrop, Denise Watts, Cllr Lynne Weatherly, Philip Whitbourn (sub), Pat Wilson and Cllr Chris Woodward

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Partnerships and Engagement Manager), Hilary Smith (Economic Development Manager) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Cllr Bill Hills (Vice-Chairman of TWBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee), Cllr Alan McDermott (TWBC Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Planning and Transportation) and Mary Harris (Kent & Sussex Courier)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: the Chairman, Alastair Tod, together with Cllr Ronen Basu, Stephen Bowser, David Bushell, Adrian Cory, Will Farmer, Jane Fenwick, Allan Gooda, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Altan Omer, Peter Perry and Cllr Frank Williams.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting dated 22 January 2015, were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2015 be approved.

3. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

22 January 2015

3 Purchase of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons

Sally Balcon, on behalf of the Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons, urged Town Forum members to remain vigilant over Targetfollow's management of the Commons, adding that any concerns should be reported to either John Barber (Chairman of the Friends group) or to her.

4. UPDATE REPORT FROM DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cllr Alan McDermott, Deputy Leader of the Council, reported on the following areas of interest:

- (a) **Fiveways** – Cllr McDermott advised that work on the public realm scheme had re-started and good progress was being made. He added that, subject to weather conditions, this stage of the work should be completed before the end of April.
- (b) **Great Hall car park** – Cllr McDermott advised that the ‘pay on exit’ trial scheme at this car park was being extended until the end of June, following discussion at the recent Planning & Transportation Cabinet Advisory Board meeting, which a number of Town Forum members had attended and at which Jane Fenwick had spoken. Cllr McDermott was keen to have more feedback from users of the trial system.

David Wakefield welcomed this news. He asked Cllr McDermott whether he was surprised at the stance adopted by central government that local authorities could not rely on the ‘automatic number plate recognition’ (ANPR) technology for enforcement purposes in its car parks. Cllr McDermott advised that the position had been made very clear by the Department for Transport that ANPR systems could not be used by local authorities for enforcement, so that councils that had already proceeded down that route might be facing having to refund penalty charge notice fines. He added that that particular technology was not an option for the Great Hall car park, or any other, unless there was a change in the legislation.

- (c) **Cultural and Learning Hub** – Cllr McDermott reported that officers were continuing their work in completing a stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund bid for this scheme. He added that he welcomed the drafting of a letter from the Town Forum’s Chairman, in which the Forum’s support had been set out, which was being discussed as part of the evening’s agenda.

Anne Stobo referred to the draft letter of support for the Hub scheme, which the Town Forum Chairman had circulated earlier in the week.

Michael Holman proposed that the letter be endorsed, with just the one alteration, namely the removal of the paragraph beginning “Such a broad-based centre ...”. This view was agreed by the Forum members.

RESOLVED – That the draft letter of support, addressed to Cllr Jane March, Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development, be approved, subject to the removal of the paragraph beginning “Such a broad-based centre ...”.

(A copy of the letter appears as an appendix to these minutes.)

- (d) **Chalybeate Spring** – Members of the Town Forum were advised that the flow of water had returned to the Spring, which would open again for business on Good Friday. Cllr McDermott added that further water level tests would be taking place.

Michael Holman sought clarification as to whether the water testing related to its quality or its continued flow. Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, advised that a test had already been undertaken to confirm the quality of the water. Mrs Smith added that what was planned was to establish some base data of the ground water level, to be able to monitor its continuing flow.

Mr Holman thanked Mrs Smith for clarifying that aspect and referred to an earlier comment made by the Leader of the Council, who had voiced support for ensuring a permanent, alternative water supply to the Spring. Cllr McDermott advised that the current focus was on establishing the precise source of the water to the Spring, before alternative options were considered.

- (e) **John Street car park** – Cllr McDermott reported that this development scheme was on track, with work due to begin in August. He added that, on 9 April, the Cabinet would be considering a proposal to establish a holding company – wholly owned by the Borough Council – to manage the residential properties included within this development; the company would have an option to undertake the same function for any additional residential units the authority might develop, it was noted.

Lorna Blackmore asked for further details about the proposed holding company, asking whether the Council intended to use any direct labour for the development work. Adam Chalmers, the Partnerships and Engagement Manager, advised that the establishment of the holding company was not for this purpose.

It was agreed that members of the Town Forum would be sent a link to the Cabinet agenda, once it was published on 30 March, to view the full details of the holding company proposals.

Action: Mike McGeary to e-mail a link to the 9 April Cabinet agenda to Town Forum members.

- (f) **Assembly Hall Theatre** – Cllr McDermott advised that the Council had appointed a consultant to examine the possibility of delivering a new theatre, with first sight of the report expected after the 7 May elections.

There were no other action points arising from this report.

5. TWBC'S DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

Hilary Smith, TWBC's Economic Development Manager, provided the Town Forum with a detailed update on what progress the Borough Council had made against the projects set out in the Destination Management Plan (DMP) action plan. She added that the DMP had been prepared in partnership with Blue Sail Consultants and Visit Kent.

The update report covered the following strands of work: the 'shared story toolkit'; an interpretation strategy; promotion of a shopping offer; quality of Tunbridge Wells' public realm; the cultural strategy; development of itineraries; access to the countryside; events and festivals; digital information; printed information; signage and maps; and the DMP steering group and business liaison/networking.

June Bridgeman raised the following points in response: (i) '**shared story**' – Blue Sail had recommended that the 'shared story' should be widely consulted upon and the Town Forum would therefore welcome sight of the current draft; (ii) **promoting shopping/Christmas** – a key objective of the general strategy was to encourage more visitors to stay overnight and use the town as a base. She felt that an assessment of the effectiveness of the promotions should have this as one of the criteria; (iii) **promoting walking and cycling in the Borough** – the poor condition of many of the town's pavements was a disincentive to pedestrians; (iv) **networking/steering group** – since the steering group's first meeting last May, nothing appeared to have been done to move it forward. The announced intention, she advised, was for it to be chaired by an independent person. Mrs Bridgeman said that without the right leadership the exercise would not take off and involve all those who needed to be playing an active role.

Mrs Smith responded to the various points raised. She advised that: (i) she would be happy to show the Town Forum the 'shared story' toolkit; (ii) with the steering group, there was a strong belief that it would be best-led by a person from the tourism sector

but that, to date, no suitable volunteer had been found. On that same topic, Visit Kent were considered to be sufficiently independent but Mrs Smith advised that she was happy to look at alternative options; and (iii) Mrs Smith said that she would welcome the continued involvement of the Town Forum in the work taking place to promote tourism.

Under the 'promoting walking and cycling' section of the action plan, Cllr Woodward commented on the reference to the initial meetings that had been held to improve the links with Explore Kent. His concern was that the Borough should be making the most of its attractions beyond the county boundary and not just limited to what Kent has to offer visitors.

Cllr Woodward also asked if QR codes were being used as a way of adding to the proposed pedestrian wayfinding scheme.

Mrs Smith agreed that the county boundary was not an obstacle to its destination management thinking, adding that collaborative work was already taking place with East Sussex authorities and more widely across the South East where that was relevant. On QR codes, Mrs Smith undertook to look at the feasibility of their use.

To reinforce the significance of the town's geographical position rather than its county connections, Dorothea Holman gave the example of Cheltenham, which marketed itself as at the heart of the Cotswolds rather than being located in Gloucestershire. She added that she welcomed the wide range of actions being taken by the Borough Council.

Cllr Bulman voiced his support for the current improvement work being undertaken to improve the town centre, adding that he looked forward to phases 2 and 3 being implemented beyond that. The Deputy Leader, Cllr Alan McDermott, advised that phase 2, which would include the length of Mount Pleasant up to the Church Road/Crescent Road junction, was being planned, but would be subject to formal discussion, full costing and Cabinet agreement before proceeding.

David Wakefield advised that the Friends of the Commons would welcome further discussion on the Destination Management Plan at some point. He added that the Friends of Tunbridge Wells Museum, Library and Art Gallery would also like to hold discussions with the Borough Council about their plans for the Cultural and Learning Hub.

Mrs Bridgeman advised that there was a presentation on "Tunbridge Wells at the centre of the Weald" taking place on 2 April. She added that she had been advised that the Borough Council was unable to provide any funding to produce maps linked to this initiative, which would showcase the attractions of the Borough. Mrs Smith advised that the Borough Council already produced a mini-guide, which included the same information, adding that, with only a small budget for such publications, it had not been possible to provide funding for this initiative.

Tim Harper felt that this particular proposal might have been worthy of TWBC support but asked for sight of the existing maps, which it was agreed would be circulated to the Town Forum.

Michael Holman felt there was a need to convince retailers that Tunbridge Wells was a destination worth visiting through the provision of postcards. He cited an example of a recent visitor who had complained that she simply could find no retailer of postcards in the town centre. Mrs Smith advised that the Tunbridge Wells Museum and the Tourist

Information Centre had both just commissioned updated photographs from the Borough Council's Publications team, for the provision of a new set of postcards.

In summing up, the Chairman of the meeting, Alex Green, thanked Mrs Smith for her very helpful update report and for the work that she and her team were undertaking to develop and promote Tunbridge Wells Borough as a destination.

Action point: Mike McGeary to circulate the current mini-guide to Town Forum members.

6. TOWN FORUM'S 'GREEN NETWORK' REPORT

Mark Booker had been leading the Town Forum group of members whose focus was on the town's 'green spaces' – their number, their significance and the need to safeguard their future. He provided a summary of the work of the group and what he hoped would lead to a set of recommendations – partly directed at the Borough Council but also leading to further work which would benefit both residents and visitors to the town and Borough.

Mr Booker welcomed the views of Forum members on the draft report which had been circulated, particularly where this could be enhanced in discussion with local neighbourhoods, with a view to the document being presented to the 21 May meeting for final approval.

Mr Booker added that he hoped the document could be used as a response to TWBC's formal consultation on a draft Urban Design Framework and he welcomed views on that aspect of the report.

The following issues were raised by Forum members:

Bus services – Michaela van Halewyn welcomed the proposals for encouraging greater use of public transport but felt that, with a decline in bus services, this was going to be difficult to achieve. Mr Booker acknowledged the point; he added that one of the report's recommendations was that a study be undertaken into the feasibility of financing discounted bus fares, to encourage much greater resident use and help to address the problems of congestion.

Walking and cycling – Kyrios Kyriacou supported what the report had concluded about the benefits and importance of encouraging more people to walk and cycle and he therefore welcomed the report and its findings.

Red brick paving – Councillor Scott supported the findings regarding red brick paving, adding that it was important that a solution be found to its funding.

Next stages – Dorothea Holman enquired if the report, in its final format, would be formally presented to the Borough Council. It was confirmed that this was the intention, Mr Booker adding that he felt it would complement a range of current policy development work, including: the Green Infrastructure Plan; the Urban Design Framework; the Transport Strategy; and the Local Plan.

June Bridgeman stated that a huge debt of thanks was owed to Mr Booker for compiling this report, which had involved researching a vast amount of data. She stressed the hope that its conclusions and recommendations would be of some considerable assistance to the Borough Council in its policy development work.

RESOLVED – That Forum members discuss the content and the findings of the consultation draft of the Green Network for Tunbridge Wells report with their residents'

associations and feed any comments direct to Mark Booker, so that a final version can be presented to the 21 May meeting, for endorsement and approval.

7. TOWN FORUM'S RESPONSE TO TWBC'S DRAFT PARKING STRATEGY

In the absence of the Acting Chairman of the Transport Strategy Working Group, David Wakefield presented the main findings which had been included in the Town Forum's formal response to the above document. It was noted that the deadline for responses had been 15 March.

One of the working group's key conclusions had been that there was a significant lack of available parking for town centre residents, largely due to commuter parking. Accordingly, the formal response had been to propose a series of practical measures to address that issue, which Mr Wakefield summarised. These included: the abolition of free parking on all streets within central zones; free parking for the first hour in TWBC's car parks; a fundamental review of car parking and season ticket charges (to maximise use of the car parks); enabling residents to use their parking permits in under-used TWBC car parks; and extending parking in resident parking zones to carers, etc.

On behalf of the Acting Chairman of the Working Group, Mr Wakefield thanked all Forum members who had provided their input into the response submitted.

Councillor Bulman provided a personal, rather than a TWBC, perspective. He felt the Town Forum had produced an excellent, thoughtful response. He added that he was also a supporter of the 'pay on exit' approach, as was being trialled in the Great Hall car park. However, he felt there had been two important assumptions made which needed to be addressed: first, he asked whether any of the proposals made in the Town Forum's response had been costed. How would the lost revenue to the Borough Council be recovered, he asked; secondly, he felt the impact on the retailers of the town to the loss of free spaces would be substantial and therefore very difficult to justify.

Councillor Mrs Cobbold felt that the Town Forum's recommendation to abolish car park payments by cash was misguided, adding that there were substantial numbers of users who did not have – or did not wish to use – credit and debit cards for car parking payment.

Mr Kyriacou believed that the numbers concerned were relatively small, adding that he felt it important that everyone should move to cashless payment over a period of time, as modern technologies made the process easier. Councillor Mrs Cobbold reiterated that there would remain users of the service who would be unable to use modern technology in this way.

In summing up the discussion, Mr Green thanked the working group members for the work that had been undertaken in compiling the Town Forum's response, adding that he was confident the Borough Council would take into account the concerns expressed by Councillor Mrs Cobbold over the use of modern technologies.

RESOLVED – That the findings and recommendations of the Transport Strategy Working Group set out in their response to TWBC's draft Transport Strategy be approved.

8. TOWN FORUM'S RESPONSE TO TWBC'S SITE ALLOCATIONS DEVELOPMENT PLANNING DOCUMENT

Alex Green, Chairman of the meeting, advised that, in the absence of the Town Forum Chairman, this issue would be dealt with under minute 9(d) below.

9. WORKING GROUPS

Ahead of the reports from the Town Forum's working groups, the Chairman of the meeting advised that, as the Forum's 'in principle' approval had already been given to the proposal to form a new working group – with a specific remit of the Cultural and Learning Hub – the exact details would be held over until the May meeting.

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – The Chairman, Michael Holman, had circulated an update paper with the agenda, covering a number of general issues as well as his usual site-specific report. Mr Holman drew attention to a number of specific progress items as follows: (i) he was pleased to advise that TWBC's Planning Service would involve the Water in the Wells Working Group members in TWBC's master planning process in respect of the three 'areas of (town centre) change', where the provision of public art would include a water feature option; (ii) at Fiveways, Mr Holman welcomed the progress being made with the first phase of the public realm scheme. He reiterated the wish of the Water in the Wells Working Group to see a water feature installed as part of the improved area and once more urged that TWBC provide a formal policy statement regarding the Millennium Clock: must it remain in its current position or may it be re-located? Mr Holman added that he would be approaching the Metrobank regarding support for a water feature, on the basis of their general policy of supporting community schemes in towns where they were already based.

Mr Holman also referred to Knights Wood and to Union House, both in the ownership of Dandara, who had responded positively to discussions with the Water in the Wells Working Group members, he advised. At Knights Wood, Mr Holman advised that Dandara had redesigned their proposals for the entrance square, to include a fine water feature, details of which would be submitted to TWBC as part of the formal planning process. At Union House, consultations were continuing with the Water in the Wells group, with a proposal from Dandara that the water features at the two sites (Knights Wood and Union House) would be thematically linked, a way forward which was welcomed.

Mr Holman expanded on the positive response he had received from Dandara, who had proposed a series of water-related inscriptions on the different features they wished to install, to provide a distinctive ideational link. Mr Holman asked Town Forum members to send him any particular ideas for appropriate inscriptions.

Councillor Scott updated Town Forum members on the position regarding the North Farm roundabouts. He advised that the efforts of TWBC had been successful and that ducting for services will be provided at two of the roundabouts. This, he added, would make provision for water features to be added at a future stage. Mr Holman welcomed the news; he advised that without the ducting, the installation of water features at a later stage would have been cost-prohibitive.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the progress report be accepted; and

- (2) That Adam Chalmers take a lead in the provision of a policy statement from TWBC regarding the future of the Millennium Clock.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – As part of her update report, the Chairman, June Bridgeman, thanked Alex Green for the work he had led on to revive the fortunes of Trinity Theatre. She added that a group of volunteers was being set up in order to transcribe the engravings on the gravestones within the grounds of Trinity. Mrs Bridgeman asked that any Forum members who wished to be part of the group to contact her, to be part of this interesting research project.

Mrs Bridgeman next referred to the proposal to establish a new Town Forum working group, whose focus would be on the development of a Cultural and Learning Hub. She thanked Dr Philip Whitbourn for his previous work in developing proposals for the future of the civic centre site which she commended as a starting point for the new group's work.

In terms of 'destination management' Mrs Bridgeman welcomed the involvement of resident groups in the continuing work of developing information points and signage.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Transport Strategy – The Acting Chairman, Jane Fenwick, had submitted a summary report on the main areas of focus for this working group, which had been circulated with the agenda.

Adam Chalmers added that, with Councillor Caroline Derrick not seeking re-election in May, responsibility for leading on road safety issues was passing to Councillor Bill Hills. Mr Chalmers added that a new local road safety group had been established – '20 is plenty' – details of which would be circulated by Mike McGeary.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the progress report be accepted; and
- (2) That Mike McGeary circulate details of the '20 is plenty' road safety campaign and how local residents can become involved.

Planning and Development Strategy – Mark Booker, the Chairman of this working group, advised that its most pressing task since the last meeting had been within the ad hoc working group chaired by Dr Philip Whitbourn to agree written representations to be submitted to TWBC on the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (SADPD). This had been completed ahead of the due deadline, he added.

Mr Booker advised that, at this stage, representations could only be made in support of the proposed allocations – or against them if they were felt to be 'unsound' within the context of national policy. He added that a number of supportive comments had been made alongside a number where it was felt that the SADPD was unsound; all the key points were summarised on page 23 of the agenda papers.

Mr Booker also advised that members of the Planning and Development Strategy Working Group would maintain a close watch on: (a) TWBC's consultation stage on the draft Urban Design Framework document; and (b) how plans for the redevelopment of Union House progressed, with further reports to be made to the full Town Forum at the next meeting.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that there was nothing to report to the full Town Forum at this stage.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Carrs Corner and other roundabouts – Sally Balcon felt that action was needed to address the poor condition of the Carrs Corner roundabout, which had remained in a damaged state for many months. In a similar vein, Cllr Barbara Cobbold felt that the roundabout at the junction of the Eridge Road and Sainsbury's had been in an 'abandoned' condition for far too long and she urged that action be taken to improve its appearance at such a key gateway into the town.

Michael Holman added that a third roundabout – at the junction of Grosvenor Road, Mount Ephraim and St John's Road – was in need of urgent attention. In this case, he advised, the roundabout road markings had virtually disappeared.

Adam Chalmers confirmed that all roundabouts were the primary responsibility of Kent Highways (KCC), adding that he would obtain an update for the next meeting on what plans might exist for rectifying the problems of the three highlighted. In the meantime, Mr Chalmers encouraged Forum members to complain to Kent Highways on their website, using the following link: <http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem>

Public realm improvement works – Kyrios Kyriacou felt that there had been some poor workmanship shown in the public realm improvement works at Fiveways. Adam Chalmers explained that a different contractor was now completing this stage of the work. He added that TWBC (who were leading on this scheme in partnership with KCC) were now content with both the working arrangements and the progress being made, with this phase of the scheme due for completion before the end of April.

TWBC ward member engagement – the Chairman of the meeting advised that the Management Committee of the Town Forum was working on plans to encourage newly-elected TWBC town ward members at the 7 May elections to become actively engaged with the Town Forum. More details would follow, he added.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 21 May 2015 at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 8.20pm.

APPENDIX

Cllr Jane March
Tunbridge Wells BC
Town Hall
Tunbridge Wells

Dear Jane

I write to express the strong support of the Town Forum for the principle of the Cultural and Learning Hub based on the Library, Museum and Art Gallery and the Adult Education Centre. The idea of melding these largely separate services into a single multi-faceted institution with more space and new resources seems entirely right.

We fully support your intention of sympathetically extending the present listed buildings, and creating dedicated display space for the town's unique collections, now largely in storage. This will do much to restore the town's standing as a tourist destination, and provide an arts and educational resource for the residents.

We look forward to seeing a new institution at the heart of Tunbridge Wells embracing the full range of the creative arts with facilities for innovation, participation and community events, and outreach involving all sectors of the local population as well as visitors. We would particularly want to see the use of modern interactive techniques and education space to combat the generational divide. It should also be possible for the Hub to provide much improved reference facilities and a local history archive, with access for researchers.

The Town Forum looks forward to involvement in the development of this exciting project.

With best wishes,

Alastair Tod
Chairman of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum