



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Draft Minutes of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum meeting held on Thursday 26th May 2011 in the Town Hall.

In the Chair – Cllr Peter Crawford

Those present –

Lorna Blackmore, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Alastair Tod, Maggie Fraser, Matt Goodwin, Philip Whitbourn, George Lawson, David Wakefield, Sally Balcom, Jane Fenwick, Chris Thomas, John Goodfellow, Veronika Segall Jones, Chris Morris, Alison Finlay, Helen Featherstone, John Mattei, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Altan Omer, Jeanne Michau, Victor Bethell, Lesley Herriot, John Forster, Anne Forster, June Bridgeman, Ian Naismith, Betsy Dix, Michael Holman and Mary Wardrop

Councillors Ben Chapelard, David Neve, Ronen Basu, Frank Williams, Tracey Moore, Caroline Derrick, Trevor Poile, Catherin Mayhew and James Scholes

Apologies –

Linda Chamberlain, Jenina Pendry, David Bushell, Kate Sergeant, David Webster, Anne Stobbo, Dorothea Holman, Peter Perry and Cllr Peter Bulman

Also in attendance

Councillors Bill Hills and Brian Ransley, Mary Harris, Marguerita Morton and Paul Harrison

Item 1 – Presentation by John Spurling and Deborah Dixon on the TWBC Core Strategy Review

A copy of the presentation is available on the Town Forum website. At the end of the presentation there were a number of questions and Cllr Ransley as the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation offered to answer some of these in addition to the two officers.

Question 1 – when TWBC figures refer to ‘the town’ do they still include Rusthall Parish?

Yes, but this will be amended as part of the consultation

Question 2 – what percentage of homes in any development is expected to be social/affordable housing?

35% is the norm

Question 3 – Houses are built by developers not by council targets. What can the council actually do to encourage developers to actually build?

The most they can do is through the site allocations and development briefs processes – there are no direct controls the council can exercise.

Question 4 – Where do the statistics shown in relation to need/demand come from?

These are projections provided by Kent County Council and are based on demographic trends and housing needs assessments.

At this point Cllr Catherine Mayhew made the following comments. The Forum needs to look at the Core Strategy as a whole and not simply those elements that are directly related to the town. For example the change of development status for Hawkhurst (from town to village) would increase the pressure to set higher targets in the town and Southborough. Similarly, changes to the status of land designated as ‘Special Landscape Areas’ would affect a number of areas and sites at the edge of the town.

Question 5 – Does the proposed development of five-storey blocks of flats on the Kent & Sussex hospital site reflect local need?

I have no note of this question being answered

Question 6 – On the basis that the figures on housing demand are based on ‘no net migration’ into the borough from elsewhere, is it the case that the KCC projections show that 90% of the need will come from those over 65?

Yes

In response to the comments made by Cllr Catherine Mayhew, Councillor members of the Forum were urged to lobby for ‘fair shares’ of development for the town – even if that means arguing in favour of development elsewhere in the borough.

Question 7 – Acknowledging that there is already pressure on schools and school places across the borough – will this be addressed?

This is part of what the CS review is about and this will involve TWBC lobbying others who provide these services and other infrastructure (see also Cllr Ransley’s comments below)

Question 8 – There are a number of sites – the Arriva Bus Garage, the site opposite the K&S Hospital, the former Telephone Exchange that could be available for development before the end of this planning process. Will that mean yet more ‘piecemeal’ development on windfall sites?

This should be governed by the allocations policy which is part of the overall Local Development Framework.

Question 9 – If the above sites come forward before the allocation policy is in place, will there be the sort of drift and expansion seen at North Farm?

There is always a risk of this. TWBC opposed the development of retail at North Farm and were over-ruled on appeal. TWBC wants a clear allocations hierarchy for retail that is town – edge of town – and only then out of town.

Question 10 – Will the towns Victorian drains take it?

See Cllr Ransley's comments below

Question 11 – Of the overall housing target to be achieved between 2006 and 2026 how many have been built to date?

1,549 of which 1,255 are in the town and Southborough (includes Rusthall Parish)

Question 12 – The question of schools, school places and what plans are in place by KCC was raised again.

Cllr Ransley made a few closing comments. Firstly he and his fellow members of the TWBC Cabinet wanted this consultation so that residents and local groups views could be heard and acted upon so he encouraged all members of the Forum to 'galvanise' their organisations into taking part.

In relation to schools, transport and other infrastructure, he is clear that there already a problem across the borough and that the K&S site for example will add to the pressures. He is already taking this up with KCC.

He shares concerns about transport, drains and other infrastructure and is determined to get contributions from developers to help with this and is putting pressure on the relevant utility companies as well.

The Forum then debated whether to hold an additional special meeting of the whole Forum or appoint a small working party to develop a response to the CSR consultation. By a simple show of hands the idea of a working party was supported overwhelmingly. Robert Hardy undertook to contact all members seeking volunteers for the working party and to conclude this by Monday June 6th at the latest.

Item 2 – Membership Changes

Robert Hardy suggested that in future (and for the avoidance of doubt) this standard agenda item should be split into two – Membership Applications (for decision) and changes of representative (for information). This was agreed.

One final round of updates to representatives took place (with a couple of further clarifications immediately after the meeting). The up to date list as of June 6th, is available on the TWBC website.

Items 3 and 4 Minutes of the March 2011 meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes were agreed as a correct record. The only matter arising was in relation to the reference in the minutes to the TWBC's role as a Director of the Regeneration Company and Cllr Atwood's concerns about this. Cllr Catherine Mayhew commented that those concerns were in relation to the fact that as a Director the Chief Executive had to exclude himself from the Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings where decisions were to be made affecting the company.

An update on this situation will be provided for the June meeting.

Item 5 – Reports from Councillors

Peter Crawford welcomed the newly-elected Cllr Caroline Derrick to her first meeting of the Forum.

Cllr Frank Williams informed the meeting that Town & Country Housing have purchased Sherwood Lake and Greggs' wood. Due to the recently agreed 'Town Green' status of this land agreed by KCC, this meant that both lake and woods would be maintained and managed for public use.

Item 6 – Civic Complex Consultation - update

In view of the fact that the 110-page report from M&N was published at lunchtime on the day before this meeting, the discussion on the Civic Complex consultation was deferred to the June meeting of the Forum, so that there would be time for members to have read the report.

Item 7 – Preparations and timetable for Town Forum officer elections

This item was introduced by Matt Goodwin on behalf of the Forum constitution working party.

Firstly, Cllr Peter Crawford was asked if he was prepared to continue as one of the Deputy Chairs. He confirmed that he was and the meeting was happy to accept this and agree that the vacancies for election were the role of Chair and of one other Deputy Chair.

Matt then made the following proposal.

1. Nominations for the positions are to be submitted to Robert Hardy at TWBC by midday on Friday 10 June;
2. Nominees for the positions must be appropriately nominated representatives of member organisations or eligible councillors;
3. Nominations must be accompanied by details of the proposer and seconder and also must include a short written "election statement" - it is axiomatic that no individual may nominate themselves but otherwise they may freely nominate any eligible Town Forum representative;
4. The elections at the June meeting will be in two stages, the first stage being election of the Chair and the second of the one/two Vice Chairs depending upon Peter Crawford's decision;
5. Just as a reminder, the role of Chair may only be held by a representative from a Residents' Association but eligible candidates may stand for both Chair and/or Vice Chair;
6. It is proposed for this first election only under the new Constitution that one representative from each member organisation, whether the principal nominee or the substitute, be entitled to vote in the elections irrespective of attendance record; the same applies for councillors;
7. The nominations for the positions will be circulated with the agenda for the June meeting together with the candidates' election statements;
8. The elections will be by secret ballot and will be managed by Robert Hardy.

The issue of eligibility of nominees for the post of Chair was raised and clarified that the constitution does include this (sole) distinction between member organisations.

In relation to point 8 above, Robert Hardy undertook to circulate the election guidance/procedure at the same time as circulating the names and statements of nominees.

These proposals were agreed. Cllr James Scholes proposed a vote of thanks to the members of the working party and this was supported.

Item 8 – Reports from Champions

John Goodfellow provided the following update on transport.

“For several years, Tunbridge Wells suffered because there was no Transportation Services beyond a single officer (Lena Benyon) after KCC took over total responsibility for Highways. The Joint KCC/TWBC Transportation Board was only an advisory board, largely commenting on KCC Highways planned activity. The RTW Town Forum could only be an Observer at Board meetings.

Now, with the new Leadership, TWBC has a Cabinet member, Cllr Brian Ransley, responsible for Planning and Transportation. It is a hefty portfolio, but Brian is thoroughly assessing the transport scenario in the borough and welcomes any input (views and suggestions and concerns) on any transport matter.

So Forum members please inform Brian of any concerns etc in your area or generally in the town; and please notify me; I will help in any way I can.

One particular issue that Brian is acting on is that a number of bus services terminate at the main station, but to turn round have to do so using Church Rd and London Rd. It would hardly be any farther for them to turn round at Sainsbury's at the West Station - and more useful, and potentially much more useful if there were an upper deck for commuter parking over part of the surface car park.

I have campaigned for nearly a decade for more car parking spaces at the hospital, as too much store was being put on the ability of the bus services to provide an adequate service to take many more bus users, without undue hardship on a fragile hospital patients and visitors, and excessive cost. TWBC has nevertheless imposed planning conditions which require the NHS hospital Trust to pay £1.6million over the next 5yrs to supplement bus services as if that would be enough.. The Trust is sensibly about to pass to KCC the organisation of which bus services benefit from the Trust's funding. I am keeping as close a look as I can on this; and so is Cllr Ransley. If any Forum member wishes to comment/get involved, please let me know.

Taxis could be a great service but there are unresolved problems, I will say no more now than to ask for any forum member to let me know of any concerns, information etc. There was a useful debate at a recent Access Group meeting - Cllr Ransley was there.”

Cllr Brian Ransley then commented to say that he has issued a paper to all councillors on a number of concerns about bus routes and related matters. Once he has replies he will take this up directly

with Arriva. This includes the issue of charging zones and the impact on the cost of bus travel to the new hospital.

Lorna Blackmore raised concerns about traffic in Vale Road and the need to lobby KCC for 'ahead-only' signage.

Katharina Mahler-Bech then gave an update on RTW in Bloom to say that 'judging day' will be on July 15th.

Cllr Ronen Basu pointed out that although the TWBC budget was £10k this year compared to £25k last year, council officers were giving up their own time as volunteers to help with planting.

Item 9 – Suggested topics for the agenda for 2011

Following suggestions made in advance of the meeting and other ideas put forward at the meeting the Town Forum 'forward plan' has been updated and is attached to these minutes as Appendix 1.

The meeting agreed that after the elections in June the Town Forum Management would need to look at this list, put the items in an order of priority and take account of the timing of meetings in order for the Forum debate to influence any relevant decision-making process. For example in relation to the K&S planning application or the KCC consultation on the library service there may be deadlines which determine when those should be considered.

This may mean that not all items on the list can be considered in 2011.

The meeting closed at 8:24pm.

Appendix 1

RTW Town Forum forward plan

Special Expenses

- Full account of each type
- Discussion as to how the Town Forum can actually have more say as to where these monies go and how they are spent. Councillors should be present for if we had a Town Council the Borough Council would have no say.

Commons (Precept)

The Commons Conservators are pencilled-in to come to the Town Forum's November meeting.

They will be asked to give the Town Forum an update of activities and to confirm what actions they will be taking to improve the springs and to ensure maintenance of all tourist attractions, not just the flora and fauna.

Democratic Accountability

Should the town have a Mayor with powers to act or should we have a Town Council or both with more powers? If we have such powers then what are the effects upon the town, the costs to the tax payer and the ability to have people elected who are able to represent all and not the few.

Planning – current issues and future changes (Localism Bill)?

Where is the accountability and how will it work in relation to the Big Society? What dangers are there as the term "Community" has yet to be worked out? What dangers are there if some communities can shout louder than others? Where does the Council come in the process?

Will the public have more say in contentious planning issues, such as unwanted extended licensing in areas inappropriate, noise pollution, smells, and unsightly satellite dishes on listed buildings.

Failure to ensure listed buildings are refurbished with appropriate materials.

Big Society and the Localism Bill

Do we really know what it means and how it could impact? Would Greg Clark MP attend a future Forum to talk about this?

Grot Spots

What is TWBC doing to ensure all grot spots are eradicated?

Transport

This must include traffic and car parking. This is widely seen as urgent and imperative and needs to be resolved before further development of the town, including building more houses, is undertaken.

TWBC should work with the Town Forum for a solution. TWBC could take a lead by setting a meeting at some point.

The Pantiles - the premier tourist attraction in the town

The Town Forum should work with the Civic Society and TWBC to ensure the economic vitality of The Pantiles is safeguarded and that the ills of the area are studied with a view to resolving the problems that plague the area.

The May Town Forum meeting suggested widening this topic to a wider examination of tourism.

The Civic Complex

The Town Forum ought to be taking a lead in the debate

Parks and Green Space Strategy

A broad debate about parks and open spaces across the town – what was the strategy, where are the plans?

NHS Changes

There needs to be a session on the changes to the NHS and that should include the changes to the way that patients and the community are represented

Library Service Consultation

KCC will be conducting this consultation later in 2011 and the Town Forum should take part.

Pub Watch/Safe Town Partnership

These organisations should be invited to talk about their work and their impact

Town Centre Masterplan

Following Cllr Atwood's commitment to a masterplan made at the March meeting, the Town Forum should re-visit the work done previously on this and in the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) to come to a meeting and contribute to this.

One other suggestion in relation to a regular Agenda item

Councillor slots

This is something which should be looked at. The concept being that at each meeting Councillors representing the Wards they have been elected to represent of the unparished should come to the Town Forum and say what they have done for their area and what they are doing to work together to improve the unparished area as a whole.