



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting Thursday 26 July 2007

1. Present:

Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Tony Bradburn (Friends of the Grove), June Bridgeman (Soroptimist International), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Albert Ellis (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Users' Association), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Matt Goodwin (Village Residents' Association), John Higgs (Hanover Road and Rock Villa Association), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove), Ian Naismith (Hanover and Rock Villa Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Gill Twells (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society) and Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association).
 Councillors Peter Crawford (Broadwater), Barry Edwards (Rusthall), John Miller (Culverden), Leonard Price (Culverden) and James Scholes (Pantiles & St. Mark's).

2. Apologies:

Jenny Blackburn (Rusthall Village Association), Betsey Dix (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Simon Smith (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association) and Tricia Wright (Calverley Park Association).
 Councillors Roy Bullock (Leader of the Council), Mrs Barbara Cobbold (Broadwater), Mrs Catherine Mayhew (Park), David Wakefield (Culverden).

(Christopher Thomas in the Chair)

3. Membership Changes

Michael Hicks has resigned from his position of Secretary of the Inner London Road Residents' Association and also from the Town Forum; Mr Simon Smith, the new Secretary for the Inner London Road Residents' Association, will replace him.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 24 May 2007

The minutes were agreed, subject to the following amendments:

Additions to minute '1.0 Present' (all to be included on the attendees' list):

'Graham Bradley, Michael Hicks, Betsey Dix, Richard Gould and Kate Sergeant'

Amendment to minute 6 'Reports from Borough Councillors'- second paragraph, first line.
 (proposed by Councillor Bullock)

Add the word 'town' in between 'new' and 'Councillors'.

Amendment to Minute 9 'Any Other Business' – Around the Clock Survey of Users' Views about Improving Five Ways, ninth paragraph, last line (proposed by Councillor Bullock)

Remove the words 'so far as to be proved wrong'.

5. Matters Arising/Actions Completed from the Meeting dated 22 March 2007

Actions outstanding from 24 May 2007 Town Forum:

Actions:

- 5.1 Matt Goodwin to contact Janet Naim regarding the job description for the Press Officer.
- 5.2 Councillor Bullock to report back to the Town Forum on any progress being made on land ownership at the Station/Morrisons.
- 5.3 Matt Goodwin to circulate the dates of his meetings with the Directors to the Forum as soon as possible.
- 5.4 The item be discussed at the next Town Forum Cabinet meeting.
- 5.6 Sean Clark to reply to Daniel Bech regarding reference to business rates being paid on empty buildings i.e. Cinema Site.

Actions Completed:

- 5.5 That David Webster prepare a short report on the most important issues arising from Sean Clark's presentation. See minute 9(A) below
- 5.7 Gary Stevenson to clarify exactly what constitutes 'an' item and what the real cost of removal was as set against the cost of £25. See minute 9(B) below
- 7.1 That Nigel Bolton confirm to Daniel Bech whether a banner advertising the Tunbridge Wells Heritage Open Days website would be displayed.
- 8.1 That Cllr James Scholes invite a Planning Officer to attend the Planning Committee workshop and presentation on 28 June.

6. Reports from Borough Councillors

None received.

7. Presentation by Robert Cottrill, Director of Planning and Development

Robert Cottrill gave a detailed presentation to the Town Forum on planning and town centre update.

Robert informed the Town Forum that the Planning Inspection had taken place and its aims were Health check; progress report from Trevor Roberts; Local Development Framework; Value for Money and Better Service.

The Town Forum noted that the results from the Trevor Roberts' report were positive and that good progress was being made within the Planning Service. Performance was improving but there was currently a low user satisfaction. Robert detailed the action plan and the next steps. The next steps would be that a report would be submitted to the Audit Commission to Council in August 2007 and a report to Cabinet seeking endorsement of the Action Plan for improvement soon after.

The Town Forum noted that on 11 January 2007, Cabinet had agreed a tender process leading to the appointment of a private sector partner to work with the Borough Council to develop plans to revitalise Tunbridge Wells, Paddock Wood, Southborough and Cranbrook town centres and to optimise the Council's property portfolio and office accommodation.

Robert went on to say that 21 expressions of interest had been received and six preferred submission of interests had been selected, namely: John Laing, Quintain, St Modwen, Grainger, Thornfield and ING Estates. Each short-listed organisation would then be invited to individual meetings.

Robert's presentation identified key sites for improvement, namely: 18 Victoria Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Habitat, Cinema Site and Morrisons. Robert gave an update on each site.

The Town Forum asked a number of questions and at the end, the Town Forum thanked Robert for attending the meeting and felt that his presentation was very informative. Robert was complimented by the Chairman for his actions in relation to grot spots and it was noted how action was now being taken swiftly regarding grot spots. The Chairman also wished to acknowledge the input of Daniel Bech surrounding the matter of grot spots and getting them cleared up.

Following this presentation, Altan Omer, Benhall Mill Road Land Association, informed the Town Forum that the association had been informed of an outline planning application by Charles Church Homes to build nearly 500 homes on the border of Tunbridge Wells and Wealden, east of Benhall Mill Road and south of Forest Road, Tunbridge Wells. He stated that all the homes would be in the Wealden District and the northern part of the development with 80-120 homes would be built on a Site of Nature Conservation Importance, a green field site.

The Association believed that a development of this size would place great strain on the roads, infrastructure and services provided by Tunbridge Wells, while the residents of the development would be paying rates to another authority.

Robert Cottrill replied by saying that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council would respond formally and consult relevant residents once a formal application for planning had been submitted and passed to the Borough Council for consultation.

8. Reports from Committees

Planning Committee (formerly Town Forum Strategy Committee) – Philip Whitbourn briefed the Town Forum on the Position Statement on Planning. He stated that the position statement reflected the feelings expressed by the Town Forum members who were present at the interactive presentation by the Chairman and the Secretary of the Committee on 28 June 2007.

Philip stated that should any member wish to receive a copy of the document they should contact Samantha Timms.

Philip also informed the Town Forum that the Committee had been consulted on the proposal for the Town Entry Signs; he stated that the Committee had no objections to the proposal.

Townscape and Street Scene Committee – Nothing to report.

Vision Committee – Michael Larsen briefed the Town Forum and advised that the Committee had given a response regarding the designated consultation document, Royal Tunbridge Wells Homoeopathic Hospital. He went on to explain the context of the document and gave detail of the Committee's response; the Town Forum noted their reply. The Vision Committee advised that option 2 would be preferred as it might save money, but a suggestion that patients were frequently visiting the hospital's consultants unnecessarily, or perhaps the Committee had misunderstood the needs of the chronically sick.

Philip Whitbourn stated that considerable effort was being made to promote Kent over the rest of Europe.

The Committee informed the Town Forum that 'equalities' had raised the issues relating to disabled access on buses and how it was impossible to travel in and out of Tunbridge Wells by bus. In the last two months, a large number of fully equipped/converted buses had come into operation and this was a success.

A new register of heritage buildings was currently being worked on but should any Town Forum member have any information they should contact Gill Twells.

Transport Committee – John Goodfellow updated members of the Town Forum on a number of issues:

The Public Transport Forum – they were pressing for something to be done about the state of the important Meadow Road bus stop, close to a main entrance to the RVP and stop for the Shopper-Hopper; John stated that there were no signs or bus shelter.

Joint Transportation Board - John updated the Town Forum that he had attended this meeting as a member of the public. The Members at that meeting had implemented the four-berth taxi rank near Five Ways and that adequate signage would be displayed.

John went on to say that County Councillors J Davies, Scholes and Bullock had insisted that a KCC officers continue to consider the Rusthall High Street pedestrian crossing petition.

The Town Forum also noted that John had written to the Chairman of the Joint Transportation Board asking to invite the Town Forum to comment on all transport issues concerning the town area.

PFI Hospital, Pembury – On Friday 27 July, the full Planning Application for the new PFI Hospital in Pembury would be lodged with the Council. Public comments would be invited until the end of August.

Housing and Environmental – Christopher Thomas reminded the Town Forum that the Housing and Environment Committee was holding a presentation/workshop on 27 September. All Town Forum members were asked to attend. One speaker will be from Creative Environmental Networks.

Actions:

- 8.1 Members of the Forum to contact Samantha Timms should they require a copy of the Position Statement for Planning.
- 8.2 That Samantha Timms email the Position Statement link to all members of the Forum and Forum Councillors who have access to email.

Questions were again raised concerning funding. John Cunningham did say that he had spoken with Cllr Bullock on the Town Forum's behalf. Christopher Thomas did advise the Town Forum that a letter was that very day being sent to Cllr Bullock on this very issue.

John Higgs also asked if the Town Forum knew how the Council were responding to input from the Town Forum. Christopher Thomas advised that in the letter referred to above this matter had also been raised. The Town Forum would be producing a year-end report.

Action:

- 8.3 That a letter be written to Roy Bullock requesting Forum funding.

9. Any Other Business

A) Investment Issues - David Webster informed the Town Forum that he had attended a meeting with one of Sean Clark's accountants John Parsons, whose responsibility included implementing the Treasury Management Strategy and Investment Policy. The meeting took place on 15 May and two members of the Town Forum joined, Keith Perry and June Bridgeman.

David went on to say that at the Town Forum meeting, concern was expressed about the Council's investment strategy and the investment return on the revenues of around £41 million. At the meeting with John Parsons, they asked how the £33 million of earmarked revenues could be invested - they were told that there was no provision for investing any of the Council's money in equities, but there was a wide range of specified investments including various deposits, long term deposits with the Government or local authorities and with credit-rated deposit takers.

David listed the current investments at 31 March 2007 that included short-term deposits with various building societies including Abbey National, Bradford and Bingley, Bank of Ireland, totaling in all, a sum of £37 million of which there was a guaranteed interest rate of just under 5%.

David stated that for 18 months, the Council had been considering using an external Fund Manager, but earlier in the year they had given notice to all their local authority clients that they were withdrawing from fund management in the local authority sector.

In conclusion, it was said that the Council's investments were fairly well managed although Keith Perry, who had experience in that area, thought there was scope for a more efficient and rewarding investment of the Council's overnight money. June had stated that she wished to know the use of some of the Council's significant revenues but that came under Sean Clark's remit, rather than John Parsons.

Members after hearing the update also asked that Sean Clark be asked if rates were automatically raised for shop owners who placed tables and chairs outside their premises.

(B) Bulky Waste Charge – Councillor Price informed Members of the Town Forum that Gary Stevenson, Head of Environment and Street Scene, had clarified what constitutes 'an item' and what the real cost of removal would be set against the cost of £25. Councillor Price stated that there was flexibility around what constitutes 'an item'. He gave an example of a microwave, fish tank and chair, which would be charged at £50; a chair on its own would be £25.

Members of the Town Forum noted that the £25 charge covered the charge made to the Council by the contractor for providing the additional service.

After hearing the reply, the Town Forum asked that Gary Stevenson be asked how the tender was put out and how was it carried out.

- (C) **New Code of Conduct for Members** – Councillor Miller informed the Town Forum that a new Code of Conduct was being adopted at the end of September 2007.
- (D) **Scaffolding at the Railway Station** – The Chairman, Christopher Thomas informed the Town Forum that Greg Clark had confirmed that South Eastern Railways had promised to paint the station during its temporary closure. The Town Forum thanked all those involved, especially Brian Hayward, Senior Design and Heritage Officer.
- (E) **Green Flag Award** – The Chairman, Christopher Thomas informed the Town Forum that The Grove had received the Green Flag Award. The Town Forum congratulated Jeff Kempster, Parks Manager, and his team for their hard work.
- (F) **DEFRA** – June Bridgeman informed the Town Forum that the DEFRA Consultation paper about charging for household waste was out in the public domain. She stated that anyone wishing to view a copy of the paper to contact her direct.
- (G) **Woodbury Park Cemetery** – June asked should anyone who uses Woodbury Park Cemetery to complete an FWPC user form; the form can be collected from June.
- (H) **Railway Station** – June asked that anyone who had specific access and other problems at a railway station toilet should complete one of the SI forms, which can be obtained direct from June.

Action:

- 9.1 That Sean Clark be asked whether or not business rates were automatically increased when shop owners placed tables and chairs outside their premises.
- 9.2 That Gary Stevenson be asked the details concerning how the contractor was appointed, how the tender process worked and how was it carried out.

10. Dates of next three meetings of the Town Forum – The Town Forum agreed to the following:

- Thursday 27 September at 7.30pm – Housing and Environment Workshop/ Presentation with two guest speakers
- Thursday 25 October at 7.30pm
- Thursday 29 November at 7.30pm

25 October 2007 Town Forum - Any reports/short papers to be emailed/posted to Samantha Timms no later than 10am on Monday 8 October 2007.