



Thursday 26 July 2012

Attended: Cllr Bob Backhouse, Sally Balcon, David Barnett (sub), Lorna Blackmore, Stephen Bowser (sub), June Bridgeman, Cllr Peter Bulman, David Bushell (sub), Cllr Ben Chapelard, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Jane Fenwick (Chairman of meeting), Anne Forster, John Forster, Tim Harper, Léonie Harrington, Sue Kaner, Jim Kedge, Kyrios Kyriacou, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Jeanne Michau (sub), Chris Morris, David Morris (sub), Marguerita Morton, Christine Phillip (sub), Cllr David Scott, Kate Sergeant, Cllr Mrs Lynne Weatherly, Victor Webb, Philip Whitbourn and Cllr Frank Williams

Also in attendance for minute 49: Ptolemy Dean and Stuart Page

44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from the Chairman, David Wakefield, together with Johnathan Brooks, Alan Bullion, Betsey Dix, Maggie Fraser, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, J Paul Lambert, Stephen Marshall, John Mattei, Altan Omer, Angela Phillips, Anne Stobo, Mary Wardrop, Margaret Watts and Councillors Mrs Mayhew, Neve and Poile.

45. DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following declarations of substitute attendance were made: David Barnett for J Paul Lambert; Stephen Bowser for Jenina Pendry; David Bushell for Angela Phillips; Anne Forster for Anne Stobo; Jeanne Michau for Dorothea Holman; David Morris for Maggie Fraser; and Christine Phillip for Michael Holman.

46. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary advised that Margaret Watts had been appointed as the new representative of the Citizens' Advice Bureau (but had given her apologies for absence for his meeting). He added that Tim Harper had been appointed as the new representative for the Camden Park Residents' Association, in place of Michelle Hull, and that Mrs Nikki Brauer had been appointed as a substitute member.

47. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2012 be agreed, subject to the addition of Victor Webb in the list of members who had given their apologies for absence.

48. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

28 June 2012

39 KCC's Commissioning Plan for Education Provision 2012-17

LH (a) Léonie Harrington, KCC's Community Engagement Officer, to forward a copy of the Town Forum's response to the six county councillors in the Tunbridge Wells Borough.

Léonie Harrington confirmed this action.

DW (b) The Chairman to contact Mary Harris at the Courier, to encourage press coverage of the Town Forum's consultation response.

The meeting was advised that this had been actioned.

40b Town Plan Panel

DW The Chairman to contact Bob Atwood, Chairman of the Town Plan Panel, to request that a presentation be made on their findings to the 26 July meeting.

This had been actioned and had become the substantive item on this agenda.

42 Proposals for the Kent and Sussex Hospital site

DW The Chairman to write formally to Berkeley Homes, calling for some form of community provision within the K&S Hospital redevelopment proposals, and that a significant amount of local labour should be used.

It was noted that this task had been completed on 2 July.

43 The use of Borough Council parks

DW The Chairman and Jane Fenwick to raise the principle with TWBC of the Forum being involved in formal discussions regarding the use of town centre parks.

Jane Fenwick advised that this had not yet been arranged.

49. THE TOWN PLAN PANEL

The Chairman welcomed the following members of the Town Forum who had been part of the Tunbridge Wells Town Plan Advisory Panel, to answer questions about their work: John Forster, Katharine Mahler-Bech and Philip Whitbourn. Two other members of the Advisory Panel were in attendance, to assist: Ptolemy Dean and Stuart Page.

The Chairman also drew attention to a briefing note on the Council's Local Development Scheme, which had been prepared by Louise Phillips, the Planning Policy Manager. This described how the report of the Town Plan Advisory Panel would be considered by the Borough Council as part of the Town Centres Area Action Plan, which now formed part of the Local Development Scheme.

John Forster led the Panel's response. He explained how the Panel had been formed, what its working methodology had been and how it had been agreed that no specific presentation would be provided for any interest group at this stage, merely a willingness to answer detailed questions about its working method, the report's content and its conclusions.

A wide range of questions about the Panel's work was asked, covering:

The Panel's vision – how did it see Tunbridge Wells adapting to the 21st century? How should the town encourage a vibrant working population over the next 30 years? What lessons can we learn from similar towns, who have managed to achieve vitality and preserve their special heritage? How do we achieve a greater number of 'staying' tourists? Where was the strategic direction from TWBC on the town benefitting from tourism?

In response, the Panel representatives stressed how their report had tried to capture what was important to the town – how its history as a spa town had helped to make it such an attractive place to live in. Rather than to view the report as a preservation-based document, it should be seen as how to encourage 'creative re-use', i.e. to capture what is important to preserve and try and ensure it did not become a clone of so many other towns.

In respect of tourism – and the financial benefits that can bring to the town – the Panel representatives acknowledged the need for more hotel accommodation but cautioned that this should be of the right calibre for the town, i.e. not a mass-market approach. The Borough Council was urged to take a robust line in respect of any hotel provision within the cinema site, for instance, more of an imaginative boutique hotel presence rather than Premier Inn-type accommodation.

Transport links and traffic management – How would the Panel's recommendations help people to move around the town more easily and encourage improved public transport? How can the town centre deal with its current disconnection from the hospital and from its major trading estate?

The Panel representatives urged a more committed approach to public transport, by making best use of the town's good links to London and look to reinstate a direct link with Brighton.

As for the current road link with the North Farm shopping area, the Panel representatives felt that this area represented a vital retail addition to what the town has to offer but expressed dismay that the road connection was so inadequate.

What response was hoped for from the Town Forum? How was the Panel's report viewed by the Borough Council?

The Panel representatives advised that their report would be considered by the Borough Council as the views of one particular interest group, amongst many other group and individual submissions. They added that they hoped very much that the issues their report raises will be acknowledged by the Borough Council, listened to and a considered response given.

A lot of the recommendations, the representatives added, were aspirational but there were some 'quick wins', they advised. These would be prioritised as part of their next stage in the process, the Forum learnt.

As a concluding comment, the Panel representatives expressed concern that a Town Centres Area Action Plan approach built upon the premise that more retail would prove to be the saviour for the town was an out-dated approach. A more creative approach was needed, they urged, whereby the whole community can become involved in the process.

Next stages - It was noted that, under the next item on the agenda, a 'Planning and Development' working group would become active once more. The Panel representatives expressed the hope that the issues raised within their report might form a key part of the working group's activity.

The Forum members endorsed this view and asked that the Management Committee work out a process and timetable to achieve this.

In conclusion, the Chairman of the meeting thanked the Panel representatives for their attendance and for answering Forum members' questions so informatively and enthusiastically and for generating so much interest in the issue.

The Panel representatives added that the next stage of their work would begin in September, after which, if the Town Forum wished, they would be happy to return and respond further.

Action – If the Town Forum approves the way forward for the group under minute 50 below, **the Management Committee** examine how the Planning and Development working group can build upon the key findings and recommendations of the Tunbridge Wells Town Plan Advisory Panel.

50. FUTURE ROLE OF THE TOWN FORUM

As agreed in June, the Chairman of the meeting presented a progress report, setting out how options 2 and 7 had been used as a basis for improving the working and the effectiveness of the Town Forum.

The circulated report described how it was recommended that the work of the Forum would be more focused on a number of working groups, with the number of meetings of the full Forum being reduced from its current number of 10 to no more than six. The report also defined more clearly what the expected role of the Management Committee would be.

June Bridgeman sought clarification on two key issues: (i) was it appropriate to place so much executive authority in the hands of the Management Committee members; and (ii) if the working group membership were limited to five in each case, how would the majority of the Forum's membership feel engaged in the process?

The Chairman of the meeting believed that the structure encouraged an emphasis away from the Management Committee and more towards the working groups, whose number and topics reflected

the current situation but could be increased and changed as needed. The working group membership of five, the Chairman added, was not fixed, but an optimum. They could include a membership drawn from across the Town Forum and co-opted experts from beyond, to encourage greater engagement.

Mike McGeary advised that the Borough Council management and political leadership wished to discuss aspects of the proposals and suggested that the current Forum Management Committee should meet with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive during the next month.

There was general support for the direction of the review and for the next stages, which would lead to a detailed proposal coming before the full membership at their September meeting.

Action – The **Town Forum Management Committee** to meet with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive, to discuss the future role of the Forum.

51. MATTERS ARISING FROM 28 JUNE 2012 MINUTES

41 Water in the Wells Working Group

In the absence of the Chairman of this working group, Forum members heard that a good response to the proposal had been received from a number of key organisations and individuals with whom discussions had been taking place. A more detailed update would be provided at the next meeting.

52. THE FORMER KENT AND SUSSEX HOSPITAL SITE

Michael Doyle felt that there was sufficient interest in this site for the Town Forum to ask the Borough Council to hold a Planning Application Forum, the process for which he outlined.

This view was strongly endorsed.

Action – As soon as the planning application for the site has been submitted to the Borough Council, **Michael Doyle** to co-ordinate the completion of a petition – requiring at least 25 signatures – to be submitted to the Planning Service of the Borough Council.

53. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The development of the Town Forum website

The Chairman of the meeting reported that she had discussed the issue of the development of the Forum's website with both Katharina Mahler-Bech and Dave Barnett. There had been agreement that the next stage would be to develop a new 'front page', which needed to be connected to the existing data and information. She sought offers of help to assist with the process.

In the absence of an immediate response, the Chairman of the meeting asked that any interested person should contact her direct.

Action – Any interested person from amongst, or known to, the **Town Forum membership** to contact Jane Fenwick if they can assist with the website development.

54. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Cllr Scott advised that the dates of the next two Town Forum meetings clashed with those of a Cabinet Advisory Board of which he was a member. He therefore gave his apologies for absence for the September and October meetings.

The meeting concluded at 8.30pm.