



# ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 26 September 2013

**Attended:** Cllr Bob Backhouse, Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Stephen Bowser, June Bridgeman, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Jane Fenwick, John Forster, Maggie Fraser, Michaela van Halewyn, Tim Harper, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Glen Horn, Sue Kaner, Bill Kern, George Lawson (sub), Katharina Mahler-Bech, Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew, Chris Morris, Marguerita Morton, Altan Omer, Angela Phillips, Cllr Nicholas Rogers, Cllr James Scholes, Cllr David Scott, David Wakefield (Chairman), Mary Wardrop, Margaret Watts, Cllr Lynne Weatherly, Cllr Chris Woodward, Victor Webb and Philip Whitbourn (sub)

**TWBC officers present:** David Candlin (Head of Economic Development), Adam Chalmers (Democratic and Community Engagement Manager), Gary Stevenson (Head of Environment and Street Scene) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

**Also present:** Léonie Harrington, Cllr Paul Barrington-King (TWBC Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Sustainability), Cllr David Jukes (Leader of the Council) and Cllr Jane March (TWBC Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development)

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Lorna Blackmore, Helen Featherstone, Alex Green, Jim Kedge, Kyrios Kyriacou, John Mattei, Anne Stobo, Alastair Tod, Jon Weller and Cllrs Peter Bulman, Ben Chapelard, David Neve, Trevor Poile, Len Price, and Frank Williams.

### 2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

There were no changes to report.

### 3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2013 be agreed.

### 4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

25 July 2013

4 Evidence of formal appointment to the Town Forum

*MMcG Representatives to submit evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum.*

The Democratic Services Officer advised that 15 out of the 35 active representative organisations had now submitted evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum. The Chairman reiterated once more the importance of submitting this information, in the interests of good governance.

## 5. UPDATE FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cllr David Jukes provided an update on a number of key issues which were of general interest to the Town Forum, as follows:

- (a) Traffic re-alignment on North Farm** – Cllr Jukes advised that there had been a great deal of co-operation from the businesses on North Farm for the traffic realignment scheme to help relieve congestion – apart from Asda, who had submitted their own, alternative scheme. He added that the Borough Council and KCC were now aiming to proceed with a new scheme without Asda's participation, although that would affect the planned cycleway.

Cllr Jukes advised that it was hoped this scheme would go out to tender at the end of October, with a February 2014 start on site and a construction period of 15 months. He added that the work should therefore be completed before the A21 dualling scheme began. Cllr Jukes paid tribute to the support and the work provided by KCC in progressing this scheme, which was being part-funded by central government.

- (b) Cultural hub** – Cllr Jukes reported on progress with this proposal, which was based on the Library and Adult Education Centre buildings. He added that he was hopeful the scheme could incorporate a three-storey art gallery in the space at the rear of the site. Cllr Jukes reported that KCC were being very supportive of the initiative and had agreed to pay half the cost of the feasibility study, the results of which had just been received.

Cllr Jukes advised that, once the proposal had been considered by KCC's Cabinet, it was intended to publish the feasibility study report. A public launch would take place, most likely in November, he added.

- (c) John Street car park** – Cllr Jukes advised that the public exhibition event for the Borough Council's proposals for this site had been successful in terms of the amount of feedback. The main issue arising from the public event had been the provision of three town houses in John Street. As a result, Cllr Jukes advised, it was intended that an amended scheme would be submitted to Cabinet, seeking approval to the supporting financial case, before planning consent was sought.

- (d) Energy study of the Town Hall** – Cllr Jukes advised that a recently-commissioned energy survey of the Town Hall had concluded that the building would need to undergo some critical energy efficiency improvements to reduce its level of energy consumption. He added that the survey had indicated that investment of up to £5m would be necessary in order to bring the building's operational rating up to the required level. The carbon footprint of the current occupation and use was in need of a 50% cut, Cllr Jukes advised.

The Leader added that the survey results would be discussed internally over the next few weeks, after which they would be published on the Council's website.

- (e) Vision 2020** – The final issue on which the Leader reported was on an updated 'vision' document for the Borough Council. Vision 2020 was in draft form; it set out a 5-year plan for the Borough, listing what was achievable and what was not in that timescale. Cllr Jukes added that Tunbridge Wells was viewed by a number of businesses and developers as the right place for growth; he confidently expected the Borough to achieve its growth potential. Cllr Jukes added that the document would be available for public consultation shortly.

The Chairman invited questions and comments from the Forum members.

Jane Fenwick asked whether the Vision 2020 draft document took account of the issues raised by the Forum in their response to the draft Transport Strategy earlier in the year. Cllr Jukes responded by saying that the Borough Council, sadly, did not have primary responsibility for the transport portfolio within the Borough. He added that there was constant discussion with KCC over transport and highways matters, but the obstacle was frequently lack of available funding. However, Cllr Jukes acknowledged that the key to addressing issues such as congestion was in maintaining a constant dialogue with KCC and working co-operatively with them.

Michael Doyle asked the Leader of the Council what the current position was with the cinema site in the town centre. Cllr Jukes stated that the Council continued to hold regular meetings with the developer and was applying as much pressure as it could, but that no firm plans were yet in place. However, Cllr Jukes was able to say that the asbestos removal programme was due for completion shortly.

The Chairman thanked the Leader of the Council for his attendance and helpful update on a wide range of issues of interest to Forum members.

There were no specific action points arising from the report.

## **6. LOCALISM ACT – ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE**

David Candlin, TWBC's Head of Economic Development, provided Forum members with a presentation on how the Localism Act enabled community groups to nominate privately- or publicly-owned buildings or land as 'assets of community value'.

Mr Candlin explained how this 'right to bid' process had been introduced in order to provide the opportunity to pause the sale of an asset that was of value to the local community. He advised on the type of asset that might be relevant and on the range of formal groups that would, typically, wish to use this power, as well as on the process which the Borough Council was required to follow. Mr Candlin also explained what the effect of a successful bid meant to the owner of the asset, who was required to inform the Council if he/she wished to sell the building or land; the group who first enabled the asset to be listed would have an opportunity to prepare and submit a 'bid to buy', which the owner was required to consider alongside any other purchase offer.

It was noted that, for an asset to be considered under this scheme, its use must be, or in its recent past must have been, 'furthering the social well-being or cultural, recreational or sporting interests' of the community.

Mr Candlin advised that the Government had provided a sum of £16m to enable community groups to be established and to prepare 'right to bid' submissions.

The Chairman opened up the subject for discussion and the following points were made:

- Cllr David Scott advised that a new community group had successfully submitted a bid for the Royal Oak public house in Prospect Road to become an asset of community value, as one of the first applications under this scheme. Cllr Paul Barrington-King added that a similar application was being prepared for a Pembury public house with the same name, adding that TWBC's Property Services had been very helpful in advising on the procedure to be followed.
- Mr Candlin, in response, advised that there had been a total of three applications to date: two had been for the Ridgeway Centre in Southborough and one for the Royal

Oak in Prospect Road, with both assets now having been listed and the owners having been advised.

- Cllr Webb advised that changes in planning legislation had resulted in an upgrading of public houses to A1; the implications of that, he felt, were that any enforced delay on the sale of a public house which was being considered for use as, say, a supermarket, and this led to a loss of sale or profit, might result in the Council facing a compensation claim. Mr Candlin advised that, under those circumstances, if the owner of the public house were able to prove that a loss had occurred, he/she might be able to claim compensation. If, however, there was no change of use involved, then the property would not form part of a community right to bid.
- The Chairman asked whether two specific assets of historical and amenity value – namely (i) The Pound, in Grove Hill Road and (ii) Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons – would be suitable for registering. Mr Candlin advised that this was up to whether relevant community groups felt that these two assets had sufficient protection already.
- Margaret Watts enquired what the position would be if an owner wished to sell a property which might be of community value but – concurrently – applied for change of use of the building. Mr Candlin advised that the ‘right to bid’ guidance was not clear on whether the process should be considered under planning legislation; he added that, as far as he was aware, an owner could still apply for change of use for a building which was the subject of a ‘right to bid’ process.

The Chairman thanked Mr Candlin for his presentation and for responding to the detailed points made.

**RESOLVED** – That the presentation on assets of community value be noted.

## **7. FIVEWAYS/MILLENNIUM CLOCK AREA – PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS**

TWBC’s Portfolio-holder for Sustainability, Cllr Paul Barrington-King, reported on the progress being made for a public realm improvement scheme for the town centre. He advised that the first part of the proposals would see a de-cluttering of the area around the Millennium Clock, which would involve some of the street furniture – such as posts – being removed, cycle racks being replaced with the Wiesbaden cycle stands and trial sample surfaces being laid down. He emphasised how the surfaces and overall appearance must be of a high quality and reaffirm the unique character of the town.

Cllr Barrington-King stated that, once the sample surfaces had been provided, the comments of Forum members would be very welcome as it was important that a consensus of approval was achieved.

He added that discussions were progressing with Network Rail over the need to repaint the bridge parapet on the south side of the station site, adding that it was hoped that they would contribute significantly to the cost of the improvement work. Cllr Barrington-King advised that Alastair Tod of the Civic Society and Tunbridge Wells MP Greg Clark were part of a working group leading on the discussions that will take place with the railway company.

Gary Stevenson, TWBC’s Head of Environment and Street Scene, tabled copies of the concept layout for the Fiveways scheme. He added that the trial scheme would feed into the design process for the next stage, which was proposed to extend both northwards and southwards along the bus gateway. Mr Stevenson advised that the lessons of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee councillor visit to Ashford town centre

had been learnt in respect of the type and quality of the materials; cost-effectiveness and long-term maintenance of the surface materials were key issues, he advised.

Forum members considered the proposals and raised the following points:

- Cllr Bob Backhouse enquired into the extent of local business support for the scheme. Mr Stevenson advised that a number of businesses in the immediate area had signalled their support for the proposals, adding that more would be contacted in the coming weeks. On this same aspect, Cllr Barrington-King thanked the K&S Courier for their publicity for the scheme and in contacting local businesses.
- June Bridgeman enquired what sort of taxi provision would be provided within the proposals. Mr Stevenson advised that, currently, a taxi rank and a feeder rank existed, adding that the results of a recent study into whether there was an unmet taxi demand in the town centre would feed into the design of the area. Cllr Webb, who advised that he was a member of the Licensing Committee who had commissioned the unmet demand survey, voiced concern that a decision on acting on the results of that survey had been deferred, to allow for full consultation. He urged that the findings be taken into account in the development of the public realm improvements.
- John Forster, in voicing his support for the design proposals and for the provision of a water feature in the Clock area, enquired whether this would result in the retention of the Millennium Clock or its relocation. Cllr Barrington-King, expressing a personal view, felt that the Clock would lend itself very well to being relocated in the main pedestrian area in Calverley Road, its former position thereby providing an improved setting for the water feature.
- Jane Fenwick raised two transport issues, namely: (i) with more traffic likely to turn into Monson Road, she felt that the location of the bus stops at the Mount Pleasant Road end would create unwelcome congestion. She felt that the bus stops should be removed from Monson Road, where there was limited pavement space for waiting passengers, and relocated outside the Town Hall, thereby creating an easier bus interchange for passengers and alleviating Monson Road traffic congestion; (ii) Mrs Fenwick felt that the parking regime in Monson Road was generally poor, in an area where there was much delivery vehicle activity and a high number of pedestrians crossing at all sections along the road. At the Calverley Road end of Monson Road, Mrs Fenwick believed that the increased traffic flow the scheme would generate would face yet more congestion, either down Camden Road or into Calverley Road, again because of a poor parking regime. Mrs Fenwick asked whether, to remedy this situation, TWBC might be considering a 'no parking' option on one side of the road. Mr Stevenson advised that these were elements of the scheme which were very much being looked at, adding that KCC highways officers were part of the discussion. Loading regimes and times were, he stressed, part of that thinking. Mrs Fenwick urged that traffic management in this area should be examined alongside the Fiveways scheme, rather than awaiting completion of the public realm proposals.
- Michael Holman voiced his strong support for the provision of more Wiesbaden cycle racks in the Millennium Clock area, which represented a welcome 'joined-up' conceptual approach towards public art, he added. Mr Holman asked how TWBC intended to move forward with the concept of a water feature and the possible relocation of the Millennium Clock, adding that

while the 'freeing-up' of the space for the water feature had some advantages, the public's view on this was vital.

- Michael Holman also referred to the 'concept layout' drawings tabled, which were dated February 2013. He asked whether there had been any subsequent changes in the design. Mr Stevenson advised that there had been no changes.
- Margaret Watts enquired whether a water feature in this location would use spa water; Mr Holman advised that there was no known spring in that location which would feed a water feature.

In summing up the discussion, the Chairman emphasised the importance of addressing the traffic implications of the proposals, which were, in general, well supported by the Town Forum.

There were no specific action points arising from this item.

## 8. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND DEPUTY CHAIRMEN

Adam Chalmers, TWBC's Democratic and Community Engagement Manager, summarised the procedural requirements for the election of the Forum's Management Committee at the Annual General Meeting in November. This had been set out in detail in a report, circulated with the agenda.

The Chairman added that, to date, there had been no expressions of interest in the post of Chairman or Deputy-Chairman; to encourage nominations, he emphasised how the Chairman was assisted in his/her role through a supportive Management Committee, consisting of the chairmen of the five working groups.

It was noted that nominations for either of the two key posts had to be made by 14 November.

**Action:** Any nominations for the positions of Chairman or Deputy-Chairman to be submitted to Mike McGear by 5pm on Thursday 14 November.

## 9. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

**Water in the Wells Working Group** – The Chairman, Michael Holman, had provided a written update report, which had been circulated with the agenda. He drew attention to three key aspects of progress:

(a) the working group's continued monitoring of key developments in the town, where the developers were actively using its unique selling point – the spa and water – in their marketing;

(b) the support provided by the Commons Conservators for a continuation of the investigations into a water feature at Brighton Lake; and

(c) an acknowledgement that TWBC's examination of responses to its Site Allocations document – which included submissions by the Water in the Wells group – was taking its time. Mr Holman added that he understood that recommendations on the Site Allocations document would be submitted to the Cabinet in the spring of 2014. He advised that he was pleased to hear details of TWBC's Vision 2020 from the Leader of the Council, adding that he hoped the spa town aspirations of the Town Forum could be incorporated into the Vision document.

In response to (b) above, Cllr Webb, who as a Commons Conservator had attended their September quarterly meeting, felt that the 'agreement in principle', to which Mr Holman referred, had not in fact been given. John Cunningham, who had attended the meeting and had made a presentation on behalf of the Water in the Wells Working Group, advised that the group had sought the Conservators' support for the continuation of investigations into the feasibility of a water feature installation at Brighton Lake. This, he opined, had been given.

Mr Holman added that further details, including the costings for power provision, fountain installation and maintenance, together with a presentation of the group's findings and recommendations, would be placed before the Conservators at a subsequent quarterly meeting of the Commons Conservators.

**RESOLVED** – That the progress report be accepted.

**Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group** – June Bridgeman, Chairman of this working group, reported on the progress made on souvenir survey work, adding that it was still possible for the questionnaire that had been provided to be completed. Mrs Bridgeman advised that the group's study had been extensive, covering a wide spread of views in terms of age and area, including discussions with the chairman of the town's business forum.

Mrs Bridgeman reported on her analysis to date on the questionnaire feedback in respect of 'the Tunbridge Wells brand', around the principal themes of 'spa', 'water' and 'the Garden of England'. She advised that top of the list was a demand for postcards and for souvenirs relating to food and drink.

Mrs Bridgeman believed that one of the issues which TWBC should consider was the use of the Borough's coat of arms in relation to souvenir items.

Mrs Bridgeman advised that she had also visited the relocated TIC on the Pantiles, to view its revised tourist 'offer'. She expressed her disappointment with the reduced size of the staffing and accommodation. Mrs Bridgeman sought the views of the TIC staff on what visitors most wanted in respect of pamphlets and was told that updating the Pantiles walk information was needed, as well as the provision of pamphlets on walks focused on interesting shopping, walks on the Common and a booklet format for cycle routes of interest.

This led Mrs Bridgeman to suggest that what was needed was a Michelin guide-type approach, aimed at short term visitors to the town. She invited Forum members to assist in developing this proposal.

In summary, Mrs Bridgeman advised that, once the working group had completed its analysis on souvenirs, a summary would be prepared and submitted to the Forum, for the views of its members. She also sought further information on TWBC's plans for the production of a Destination Management Plan.

In response, Cllr Jane March thanked Mrs Bridgeman and her working group for their extensive work. In response to the specific points raised, Mrs March advised that the operation of the TIC would be reviewed after 12 months; she added that the Borough Council was planning to look at the possibility and benefit of employing knowledgeable students to assist during the summer period.

On the Destination Management Plan, Cllr March supported June Bridgeman's view that there was a need for more written information to be provided in the form of pamphlets, where a focus on walks and cycling would appeal to many potential visitors, she added.

With souvenirs, Cllr March stressed the importance of encouraging private enterprise to lead on this provision, rather than it being TWBC-led.

Cllr March acknowledged the issue of the coat of arms, adding that while it existed for the Borough Council's sole use, she believed that the former (pre-1974) version was available for wider use.

In conclusion, Cllr March advised that there appeared to have been some parallel working taking place between the working group and TWBC in its Destination Management Plan work so far; she added that the Borough Council would be seeking the Town Forum's – and the working group's – support in delivering the Plan's recommendations.

**RESOLVED** – That the progress report be accepted.

**Traffic Strategy Working Group** – The acting Chairman, Jane Fenwick, had submitted an update report with the agenda; this included:

- (a) the **Transportation Strategy**, a revised version of which, she advised, would not appear until April 2014. Mrs Fenwick added that she hoped that TWBC's Parking Manager, Rosemarie Bennett, would be attending the 28 November Forum meeting, to talk about the draft **Parking Strategy**. It was anticipated that Forum members could play an active role in helping to develop the content of the draft strategy, Mrs Fenwick advised.
- (b) the **Carrs Corner roundabout**, where Michael Holman advised that, as far as he was aware, there were no plans for a water feature. He added that he felt that the new roundabout had actually resulted in a more dangerous crossing for pedestrians, due to the smaller structure leading to the likelihood of faster vehicle traffic. A point was raised as to why there had been no public consultation on this scheme. Mrs Fenwick advised that she expected this subject to feature on the agenda for the next Joint Transportation Board meeting, where she would voice these concerns, adding that she believed the pedestrian refuge had been planned for the wrong location.

Léonie Harrington, on behalf of KCC, offered to feed back views about the Carrs Corner roundabout to the Highways and Transportation service. Cllr Webb felt that while the structure was visually an improvement and assisted larger vehicles to negotiate the roundabout, he acknowledged that pedestrians faced a more difficult crossing. June Bridgeman particularly asked that the needs of wheelchair users be considered, especially across Crescent Road, adjacent to the roundabout.

**RESOLVED** – That, at the request of the Chairman, Léonie Harrington feed back the comments and views of the Town Forum – as summarised above – to the Highways and Transportation service at KCC.

**Planning and Development Strategy** – Michael Doyle, Chairman of this working group, drew attention to TWBC's latest 'Local' magazine, which he felt contained much helpful and informative detail about some key developments in the town, including the civic complex and Calverley House, the latter likely to be converted into 55 housing units but with no car parking provision, he added.

Margaret Watts enquired how many residents' parking spaces existed in relation to the number of permit holders. Cllr Catherine Mayhew advised that the answer to that varied significantly, according to which zone applied. Adam Chalmers added that this information could be researched and an answer provided direct to Ms Watts.

Cllr Mrs Mayhew also summarised how the Government's changes on permitted development rights were having an impact on TWBC's ability to manage changes of use of buildings – and other planning matters – which was causing concern in some areas.

**Action:** Mike McGeary to liaise with the Parking Manager re. resident parking statistics.

**Finance and Other Issues** – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, also drew attention to the 'Local' magazine and the article on TWBC's budget, which he commended to Forum members. Of particular note, he added, was the fact that TWBC was forecasting a net reduction of nearly £1m in the cost of delivering services in the current year. He added that the latest set of accounts had shown that there had been no transfer from revenue reserves in 2012/13.

Cllr James Scholes, the portfolio-holder responsible for finance, advised that TWBC needed to manage a government grant reduction of £657k in 2014/15; there was an additional cut of £520k in central government grant funding in 2015/16, he added. The consequence, Cllr Scholes advised, was that there was pressure to cut some services, although ways of trying to increase income and achieve yet more efficiency savings was a constant process.

Finally, the Chairman invited other members of the Forum to join him on the working group, which would need to meet in the autumn, to consider a number of TWBC consultation issues.

**Action:** Any Town Forum members wishing to be part of the Finance and Other Issues Working Group to contact David Wakefield direct.

## 10. FUTURE CONSULTATION ISSUES

Mike McGeary had circulated a list of future consultation issues which the Borough Council would be leading on, drawn from TWBC's 'Notice of Intent to Make Key Decisions'.

Cllr James Scholes particularly welcomed the Forum's input into the 'setting of fees and charges 2014/15' item, which was being considered by the Cabinet on 21 November.

Cllr Webb advised that the Leader of the Council had written to Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, to voice this authority's concern over the level of grant cuts to local authorities. Cllr Webb added that he would like to see KCC having to face similar cuts, rather than a continuation of pressure on district councils. Cllr James Scholes, both a KCC and a TWBC member, advised that the financial pressures were just as acute on the county council as they were on TWBC.

There were no action points arising from this report.

## 11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Léonie Harrington advised that the six county councillors within the Borough had collectively been allocated a fund of £38,700, to award one-off grants for **small capital projects**. The projects, she added, had to be able to demonstrate a community benefit; the deadline for completed application was 13 October.

(b) Miss Harrington also advised that KCC's consultation process on the **future of children's centres** across the county was due to end on 4 October. She urged those wishing to comment to complete the process within the following week.

## 12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Town Forum administrator, Mike McGeary, reminded the group that the AGM and next ordinary meeting would be taking place on Thursday 28 November, starting at 6.30pm.

He also drew attention to the proposed meetings' schedule for 2014, namely:

16 January  
20 March  
8 May  
10 July  
25 September  
27 November (including the AGM)

The meeting concluded at 8.15pm.