



# ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 26 November 2015

**Attended:** Bob Atwood, Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Adrian Berendt, Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, David Bushell, Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold, Adrian Cory, John Cunningham, Jane Fenwick, Allan Gooda, Michaela van Halewyn, Tim Harper, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Bill Kern, Kyrios Kyriacou, Brian Lippard, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Paul Mason (sub), Marguerita Morton, Cllr Tracy Moore, Chris Morris, Altan Omer, Cllr Catherine Rankin, Cllr James Scholes, Cllr Don Sloan, Anne Stobo, Alastair Tod (Chairman), David Wakefield (sub), Mary Wardrop, Denise Watts, Dr Philip Whitbourn (sub), Pat Wilson and Cllr Chris Woodward

**TWBC officers present:** Diane Brady (Property and Development Manager) (Item 6), Adam Chalmers (Head of Partnerships and Engagement), Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance and Corporate Services) (Item 7), Terry Hughes (Interim Community Safety Unit Manager) (Item 9), Simon Wilshaw (Community Safety Officer) (Item 9) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

**Guest speakers:** Rhiannon Harfoot and Jennette Emery-Wallis (item 8)

**Also present:** Cllr David Jukes (Leader of the Council) and Cllr Jane March (Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development)

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Caroline Auckland (sub), Cllr Bob Backhouse, Cllr Ronen Basu, Cllr Peter Bulman, Michael Doyle, Shauna Dupuy, Alex Green, Cllr Lawrence Heasman, Ann Hughes-Wilson (sub), Sue Kaner, Claire Luxford, Cllr David Neve, Angela Phillips (sub), Nick Pope, Cllr David Scott and Cllr Lynne Weatherly.

### 2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary reported the following: (a) the new representative for the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society was Brian Lippard; and (b) the Town Forum's Management Committee had approved membership applications from: (i) the Avenues Residents' Association and (ii) the Friends of the Grove. Tim Tempest was the nominated representative on behalf of both organisations.

### 3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting dated 24 September 2015 were submitted for approval.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2015 be approved.

### 4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

24 September 2015

## 4(h) Sewage egress, Warwick Park

Mike McGeary advised that the meeting which had been arranged by the Leader of the Council with Southern Water's operations manager to discuss the on-going concerns of sewage ingress at Warwick Park, to which John Cunningham had been invited, had been cancelled by the company at very short notice. The Leader of the Council advised that he believed that a revised date had been fixed, details of which would be forwarded to Mr Cunningham.

Mr Cunningham reiterated the growing concerns of affected residents and urged that pressure be brought to bear upon Southern Water. He added that an area of new development had revealed the presence of a drainage system which did not appear in the company's records.

## 4(6) 'Developing our Green Networks' (On-going action point)

The findings and recommendations of the recently-published report on 'Developing our Green Networks' have an impact on all of the Forum's working groups. This remains as an on-going action point for the immediate future.

## 4(8) Pedestrians and buses

Mike McGeary advised that a discussion paper prepared by Mark Booker, entitled 'pedestrians and buses in Tunbridge Wells: an aide-memoire of issues' would be used as the basis for more detailed discussions in due course when bus routing and more general town centre matters were coming up for consideration.

## 5 Refurbishment work at the St John's Sports Centre

Mike McGeary advised that regular updates on the progress of the refurbishment work at the Sports Centre were available from the Fusion Lifestyle website, a link to which was set out in the agenda papers.

## 5 Public Realm scheme

The Leader of the Council reiterated his dissatisfaction with the workmanship carried out in the early phase of this scheme which, he advised, had been caused by a lack of supervision. He advised that the repair work had been delayed until after the Christmas period. In the meantime, Cllr Jukes added, the pelican crossing point had been removed.

Michael Holman felt that the chipping of some of the paving slabs suggested that not only poor workmanship was evident but the quality of the material was sub-standard.

## 6 Town Centre Partnership

Mike McGeary advised that, as agreed at the September meeting, he had notified Town Forum members when this issue had appeared on relevant agendas, in order to alert interested individuals to the formal discussions and decision-making taking place.

## 9 Electoral equality and arrangements

Mike McGeary advised that, as discussed, he had invited the views of the Town Forum Management Committee on this topic, the responses having been submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny task and finish group leading on this work. He added that a report would be submitted to the December full Council meeting on this matter, with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations.

**5. UPDATE REPORT FROM TWBC'S CABINET**

Cllr David Jukes, Leader of the Council, reported on the following areas of interest:

- (a) Syrian refugees** – Cllr Jukes advised that, as part of the Government's commitment to re-house a number of refugees from Syria, Tunbridge Wells was one of two local authorities in Kent (Ashford being the other), that would shortly be taking in two families. He added that central government would be fully funding the initiative and carrying out all the necessary checks. He also stressed that the families would not be provided with social housing but would be allocated homes from within the private sector. He expressed the hope that all such families would be welcomed and helped with their assimilation into life in the Borough. Michael Holman urged that, despite this very welcome news, there should be a minimum of publicity attached to the families, in order to help with settling in speedily. The Leader of the Council acknowledged the point, adding that KCC's Adult Social Services were leading on all aspects of the families' integration.
- (b) Civic complex and the Assembly Hall Theatre** – Cllr Jukes advised that the authority's proposals, details of which were the subject of a presentation later on the agenda, had received cross-party support at recent meetings where they had been considered, an aspect with which he expressed his appreciation.
- (c) Casino** – Cllr Jukes advised that, despite the recent headlines in the Kent & Sussex Courier, the authority had no plans to build or encourage a casino to be established in the Borough. He added that the story had grown from the fact that the authority had the option within its agreed Licensing Strategy to allow a casino, should a proposal ever come forward.
- (d) Draft budget 2016/17** – Cllr Jukes advised that the Cabinet would be considering the Borough Council's draft budget for 2016/17 on 3 December. Immediately after that, he added, there would be a six-week formal consultation period, in which all interested parties had the opportunity to comment. Cllr Jukes added that the Borough Council had received an unqualified opinion from its external auditors for its financial management for six consecutive years and, over the same period, had achieved a balanced budget position. Together, Cllr Jukes advised, this represented a very satisfactory position for the council tax payers of the Borough.
- (e) Cinema site** – Cllr Jukes advised that pre-application discussions had been held with the prospective purchasers of this site.
- (f) Planning Support services** – Cllr Jukes advised that it had been formally decided by the Cabinet that the Planning Support service would be brought back in-house, following significant performance problems during its time as a shared service with Maidstone and Swale Borough Councils. He added that, because of the need for the software system provider to create a separate 'instance' of the Idox software, alongside continuing to provide updates to the current 'instance', it would take until June/July 2016 for the in-house service to be fully implemented.

**(g) The Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday** – Cllr Jukes advised that, on 21 April 2016, Her Majesty The Queen will be 90 years old; on 10 June 2016, The Duke of Edinburgh will be 95. The Leader of the Council added that the Lord Lieutenant of Kent had written to local authority Chief Executives in the county, asking them to encourage local communities to join in with the celebrations. Adam Chalmers, the Head of Partnerships and Engagement, added that there would be a budget available to help residents' associations and 'friends of' groups organise suitable events as part of these celebrations.

There were no action points arising from this report.

## **6. THE CIVIC COMPLEX AND THE ASSEMBLY HALL THEATRE**

Miss Diane Brady, TWBC's Property and Development Manager, summarised the Borough Council's proposals for the future of the Town Hall and the Assembly Hall site, with the Cabinet due to consider the principle of commissioning a new theatre and vacating the authority's current office accommodation at its meeting on 3 December.

The Town Forum members considered the proposals and raised the following issues:

- Denise Watts enquired where the unloading and loading of stage equipment etc would take place in the new theatre location, bearing in mind the amount of space the existing arrangements required. Miss Brady advised that this level of detail was exactly what the specialist theatre consultants would be examining, adding that this would impact upon the options available to the authority;
- Jane Fenwick noted that the option as presented had already established a certain level of credence. She asked that other options for delivering the Council's ambitions for a new theatre and for alternative office accommodation also be progressed to the same level, so that the public could make a better-informed judgement on the Council's ambitions. Mrs Fenwick added that she was aware of a certain level of concern about the impact that the two large buildings would have right on the boundary of Calverley Grounds. Miss Brady advised that these comments would be fed back to the Council's consultants;
- Bob Atwood wondered whether the option still existed to leave the civic complex building intact, even though new Council offices were to be provided elsewhere. Specifically, he asked what plans existed for the future of the existing Borough Council offices. Miss Brady advised that the full Council was at the point of being asked to determine, as a matter of principle, whether it wished to (a) deliver a new theatre and (b) vacate the Town Hall building and relocate to new offices. She advised that the public should note that the designs which had been presented to the meeting were very much conceptual in nature at this point, adding that all comments made by Town Forum members would be fed back to the consultants;
- David Wakefield sought clarification as to the visual impact of the new buildings when viewed from Calverley Grounds. He also asked how much accommodation in the new offices would be taken up by the Borough Council. Miss Brady reiterated that the illustrations at this stage were very much indicative only. She advised that part of the next stage was for the Borough Council to determine its own office accommodation needs, adding that there was an acceptance that part of the new building would be available for commercial renting, thereby ensuring a significant income stream for the authority. The design of the two buildings, Miss Brady emphasised, would very

much need to take account of the views of Historic England and the Council's own Planning Service;

- Tim Harper enquired how the new buildings would be financed. Lee Colyer, TWBC's Director of Finance and Corporate Services, acknowledged that at this stage there was a viability gap. He added that the Borough Council had insufficient reserves to fund the scheme, leading to some borrowing being likely;
- Paul Mason asked what the implications were of the Council following the 'do nothing' option. Miss Brady advised that the authority had already established that the cost of bringing the Assembly Hall Theatre up to the required standard – including enlargement to be able to attract West End shows – was in excess of £10m. She added that a similar sum would be required for the Town Hall building, in order to meet modern day energy efficiency standards and complete backdated maintenance work. Even having spent such sums on the Town Hall, Miss Brady added, the offices would not provide for modern-day flexible working arrangements;
- Michael Holman welcomed the fact that the Borough Council was holding such detailed discussions with all interested parties.

In summing up, the Chairman, Alastair Tod, expressed his thanks to Miss Brady for her presentation and responses to the various issues raised.

There were no specific action points arising from this report.

## **7. TWBC'S DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2016/17**

Lee Colyer, TWBC's Director of Finance and Corporate Services, reported on the Borough Council's draft budget for 2016/17. He drew attention to his report which had been made to the authority's Finance and Governance Cabinet Advisory Board on 10 November, which provided a detailed background to the Council's budget-setting process. One of the principal aspects, it was noted, was the continuing loss of central government grant support for local government. Mr Colyer advised that, by 2020, it was expected that this Council would no longer receive any grant support from the Government.

Mr Colyer also explained the rationale behind the proposal to increase the Council's salaries budget by approximately £500,000 per annum, in order to deliver the approved Development Programme.

Mr Colyer provided further context around this proposal. He advised that the challenge the authority faced was how to grow the business rate base sufficiently to cover the loss of £1.6m currently received by way of central government grant.

Mr Colyer advised that, once the draft budget had been approved by the Cabinet on 3 December, it would be subject to formal public consultation for a six week period.

Members of the Town Forum considered the report and raised the following matters:

- David Wakefield sought clarification over the timings within which his working group could consider the details of the draft budget and make a formal response. He also sought additional members to join him on the working group.

Mr Colyer advised that he would let Mr Wakefield know the exact timetable within which his group could comment in due course. (Confirmed as 15 January 2016)

- Bob Atwood congratulated Mr Colyer and his staff for their continued success in managing the authority's finances so effectively. He asked whether there was any risk that the authority could lose any of its reserves to central government, especially those which were currently not earmarked for a specific purpose. Mr Atwood also asked for further details of the proposed 'Development Programme additional staffing resources' of £500k.

Mr Colyer advised that central government, as a matter of course, did take a keen interest in local authorities' reserves. He added that this emphasised the importance of earmarking reserves for specific purposes. He drew attention to his report, which showed that there were £11.78m earmarked reserves as at 31 March 2015 and £7.72m in the 'general fund', which were not yet allocated.

Mr Colyer explained how the proposed additional £500k for salaries was intended to be a crucial factor in the authority delivering its ambitious programme of property development, which was outside its normal budget activities. He added that the disciplines and skills necessary did not exist internally, hence the need to recruit, although he warned that, because of the challenging job market in this profession, weighted salaries with supplements would probably be required.

Mr Atwood warned that, if the Council approved the £500k additional salary costs to help deliver the Development Programme, it would be following an irreversible pathway, a situation which he felt was reminiscent of the ultimately unsuccessful Regeneration Company initiative.

- Jane Fenwick referred to paragraph 2.20 of Mr Colyer's report, which described how parish and town councils had been asked to help deliver some discretionary services, partly because they did not face a capped limit in their precepts. In the town area, Mrs Fenwick acknowledged that special expenses applied to services which were provided for that area alone. She asked how the Town Forum might be able to assist the Borough Council in determining what special expense priorities the authority should focus on.

Mr Colyer advised that the special expenses which applied to the town area were almost exclusively historical, so there were no 'priority' choices to make. However, he added that where the Town Forum might wish to assist was in commenting on issues such as the quality of the parks contract, which was specific to the town area and, therefore, was one example of a special expense.

Mrs Fenwick asked if this was best conducted through the Finance and Other Issues Working Group. The Chairman of that group, David Wakefield, expressed his full support for the suggestion, adding that any recommendations arising from that process would be fed back to the full Town Forum.

- Allan Gooda welcomed the proposal to employ specialist staff direct in order to deliver the Development Programme. He asked whether that would obviate the need for the continued use of consultants. Mr Colyer advised that there would be a separate sum provided for the use of consultants; this, he explained,

would be in the format of an extension of the £1m budget originally agreed and would be considered by the Cabinet at its 3 December meeting.

- Michael Holman enquired what the current level of revenue was from business rates in the Borough. Mr Colyer advised that this was £52m, of which only £2.1m was able to be retained by the Borough Council. He added that, while the Government had announced plans to enable local authorities to retain all revenue from business rates by 2020, it was known that there would still be some form of re-distribution in place from economically successful areas to other parts of the country where public expenditure exceeds the amount generated by business rates. Further details would emerge, he added. Mr Colyer advised that the Borough Council currently paid £1.2m in business rates in respect of its own properties.
- John Cunningham sought clarification over the authority's historical reserves – including earmarked sums – and the amount the Council still held from loans. Mr Colyer advised that some of the historical reserve sums he had heard mentioned, such as £55m at one stage, were misleading, as they related to a point in time when the housing stock transfer had taken place. The current reserves stood at a figure of £21.058m (as at 31 March 2015) he advised, a sum which had been boosted by the disposal programme of non-performing assets.

Mr Colyer added that earmarked expenditure in the current year included significant improvement/enhancement work to both the Assembly Hall (completed) and the St John's Sports Centre (ongoing). Mr Colyer added that the authority's debt did not feature in the reserves summary; he also advised that of the original £20m loan taken out and which was being repaid, £9m remained, which was currently worth £10.2m through prudent investment.

- Marguerita Morton was interested to learn more about the sum raised through the housing stock transfer, particularly the Southborough element. She also enquired whether the Government intended to provide for a phasing in of the business rate retention proposal and when the Borough Council would benefit from Local Enterprise Partnership funds, to help provide improved infrastructure.

Mr Colyer advised that the housing stock transfer had taken place in 1992 and related to the authority's social housing stock across all parts of the Borough. Further details, he added, could be found from the Council's website, as this had been answered in detail following an earlier Freedom of Information request.

He added that further details of the business rate retention proposals would emerge from central government in due course. With the Local Enterprise Partnership, Mr Colyer acknowledged that this Borough had not, to date, been successful with its bids so would argue the case more robustly in future attempts.

Mr Colyer was thanked for his presentation. There were no specific action points arising.

## **8. PROPOSED PLAY AREA, CALVERLEY GROUNDS**

Rhiannon Harfoot and Jennette Emery-Wallis were welcomed to the meeting and presented their plans for a children's play area on the former bowls green in Calverley

Grounds. They emphasised how the scheme would be very much community-led and how the facility would provide a significant boost not just for local residents but in attracting tourists too.

Mrs Harfoot advised that a high level of public consultation had taken place in the preparation of the proposals. She added that the immediate next steps included a meeting with the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development and TWBC's Chief Executive, seeking an 'in principle' commitment to the scheme, after which a fund-raising strategy would be finalised and implemented.

Town Forum members raised the following issues concerning the proposals:

- Cllr Chris Woodward asked where the idea had come from to focus on facilities for the up-to-10-year-old group. Ms Emery-Wallis advised that research had shown that there were very few facilities catering for this age group, so it was felt it would address a specific demand. She added that, to provide facilities for teenagers would have required much more space than the Calverley Grounds could provide.
- Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold expressed her full support for the proposal.
- Denise Watts was also supportive but with 'sand and water' being a component of the scheme, she asked who would be responsible for its maintenance. Ms Emery-Wallis advised that maintenance of the equipment was one important aspect of the discussions to be held with TWBC. She added that the scheme aimed to provide robust equipment, in acknowledgement of its likely high usage.
- Brian Lippard asked whether thought had been given to potential problems of mis-use of the equipment late at night, because of the town centre location. Mrs Harfoot acknowledged the point. She advised that discussions had been held with both TWBC's Parks' staff and with the Police, adding that maintaining the quality of the equipment as well as the proximity of CCTV cameras were two key elements.
- Cllr James Scholes asked how much it would cost to provide and equip the play area. Mrs Harfoot advised that this had been estimated at £213k for the capital cost.
- Steve Bowser felt that there were four other play areas in or close to the town centre and questioned whether there was a sufficient demand for this facility. Mrs Harfoot responded by saying that the provision of suitable play facilities in the town centre was seen as a high priority arising from the consultation undertaken. She felt the play facilities in the Grove were the only other viable option for many parents with young children living in the town centre.
- In response to Steve Bowser's belief that there was a greater need for facilities for teenagers in the town centre, Cllr Catherine Rankin advised that KCC's new youth hub would shortly be opening in Grove Hill Road, which would provide suitable and supervised activities for teenagers.

In summing up, the Chairman thanked Mrs Harfoot and Ms Emery-Wallis for their presentation and wished them well with their initiative.

## 9. PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS

Terry Hughes, TWBC's Interim Community Safety Unit Manager, and Simon Wilshaw, Community Safety Officer, were welcomed to the meeting. They reported on the introduction by the Government of 'public space protection orders', which had been brought in to replace alcohol control zones and to help the Police and local authorities address anti-social behaviour.

Mr Hughes advised that there would be full consultation with all interested parties before a specific protection order was introduced. He added that, once in place, an order would exist for three years and then be subject to review. He stressed the importance of enforcement of any order, to ensure the maximum compliance.

Mr Wilshaw advised that, in terms of the effectiveness of public space protection orders, a reasonable amount of evidence existed which demonstrated their positive impact on people's actions and behaviours.

Members of the Town Forum raised the following points:

- David Wakefield felt that the Friends of the Commons would be very interested in learning more about the orders and asked if Mr Wilshaw could attend their next meeting. Mr Wilshaw confirmed he was happy to assist.
- Jane Fenwick said that the private Calverley Park was covered by the alcohol control zone for the adjacent public park – Calverley Grounds – but she was concerned that the new orders would only apply to public land in future. Mr Wilshaw advised that the protection orders could only apply to public land but added that there were other powers available to deal with trespass upon private land. Mr Hughes also advised that the alcohol control zone included roads leading to/from Calverley Grounds, if that were of assistance to the residents of Calverley Park.
- Sally Balcon advised that the residents of Queen's Road had endured problems with a person sleeping in a caravan parked in their road. She asked whether a protection order might be appropriate under these circumstances. Mr Wilshaw advised that this might well be appropriate, if the person were engaged in anti-social behaviour. Mr Hughes added that this particular individual was known to the Community Safety Unit.

In thanking Mr Hughes and Mr Wilshaw for their report, the Chairman advised that the latter's contact details would be circulated to Forum members, to pursue further information if they wished. [simon.wilshaw@tunbridgewells.gov.uk](mailto:simon.wilshaw@tunbridgewells.gov.uk)

## 10. 20s PLENTY AND RESULTS OF CYCLING STRATEGY CONSULTATION

Due to the late time, Adrian Berendt advised that he would defer this item until the next meeting.

## 11. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

**Water in the Wells Working Group** – the Chairman, Michael Holman, advised that discussions continued with developers where any major scheme was taking place, in order to achieve more water features. With the redevelopment of Union House, details of which had recently been unveiled, Mr Holman welcomed the fact that progress was being made but he was concerned that there appeared to be no truly iconic water

feature design included in the initial proposals. He welcomed the play area proposals for Calverley Grounds.

Mr Holman advised that, due to the lateness of the hour, he would produce a written update report for Forum members. This is attached as **Appendix A** to these minutes.

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

**Tourism and Leisure Working Group** – Dorothea Holman, Chairman of this working group, advised that her members were keen to build upon the co-operative work already taking place with TWBC. She added that Hilary Smith, TWBC's Economic Development Manager, had been invited to the group's next meeting, to provide an update on the Council's current tourism project work.

Mrs Holman added that the working group: (i) had prepared a questionnaire on the 'visit tunbridge wells' website which they would like to circulate to Forum members; (ii) had been looking at another 'leisure cycling path route', details of which would be reported shortly; and (iii) was keen to help the promotion of Tunbridge Wells as a visitor destination through the newly-established Tunbridge Wells Together partnership.

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

**Transport Strategy** – Jane Fenwick, Acting Chairman of this working group, referred to her written report, which had been distributed with the agenda. This had included a report on the issues discussed with some working group members at a meeting (23 October) with Hilary Smith, TWBC's Economic Development Manager.

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

**Planning and Development Strategy** – Mark Booker, the Chairman of this working group, was also aware of the late hour and undertook to submit a written report for circulation with the minutes. This is attached as **Appendix B**.

He welcomed the proposals for the play area in Calverley Grounds, which he felt linked well with the Green Network aims and briefly reported on the following matters: (i) he wished to record his thanks to TWBC's Planning Policy team for their plans for another presentation to Town Forum members, taking place on 12 January at 2pm; (ii) the current 'examination in public' being conducted on TWBC's Site Allocations document was revealing the extent of the pressures from developers in relation to future housing numbers for the Borough. He added that factors such as the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Green Belt were legitimate mitigating factors but a key element was whether the Inspector conducting the examination was satisfied that TWBC had a full five-year housing supply firmly in place.

Finally, Mr Booker advised that the working group had expressed serious reservations about the nature and the scale of Dandara's design plans for the replacement of Union House

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

**Finance and Other Issues** – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that there were no issues to report on.

**Culture** – Bob Atwood, Chairman of this working group, advised that one of the key projects within his working group's remit was the proposed cultural and learning hub.

He advised that the result of the re-submission of the funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund would be known early in December.

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

## 12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

**(a) Ice Rink and Glühwein** – Michael Holman reminded Forum members that Klaus Doessler would be serving Bratwurst, Glühwein and giant potato curls once again, at the twin-town chalet in the Calverley Grounds from 11 – 13 December. Mr Holman added that all Town Forum members were invited to have a free glass of Glühwein at the chalet on Saturday 12 December, between 12.30 and 2pm. Mike McGeary would be e-mailing an invitation to all Town Forum members, which should be presented at the chalet in order to secure the free drink.

**(b) Tunbridge Wells Museum – national award** – Anne Stobo announced that Jasmine Farram, a Visitor Services and Administrative Officer at Tunbridge Wells Museum had won a national award for young people (under the age of 25) working in museums. She added that it was the Robert Logon Award from the British Association of Friends of Museums, in recognition of her ‘selfie’ project which Miss Farram had developed to help engage teenagers with the Museum’s collection of 18<sup>th</sup> Century portraits. Members of the Town Forum added their own congratulations to Miss Farram and to the Museum.

**(c) Gatwick night flights petition** – Steve Bowser advised that, following on from the on-line petition he had started, there would be a public meeting taking place at the Assembly Hall on 28 November to learn more about Gatwick’s plans, which Greg Clark MP would be attending.

**(d) Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons** – The Chairman advised that a petition had been started by Terry Cload, seeking support for community ownership of the Commons. He added that this could be accessed via the TWBC website.

## 13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 28 January 2016 at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 8.55pm.

APPENDIX A – Progress report from the Water in the Wells Working Group

APPENDIX B – Progress report from the Planning and Development Working Group

**APPENDIX A****WATER IN THE WELLS WORKING GROUP****Progress report for Town Forum Meeting 26 November 2015****1. GENERAL:**

- i) We are continuing to liaise with developers, the Borough Council (especially Planning), KCC and stakeholders in the vicinity of major identified sites. A new development is the more active consideration of 'dry' water features in the form of water-themed public art. This particularly concerns sites such as roundabouts, where a live water feature might not be considered appropriate. As with live water features, we have to be ready to move into action at the right stage in the planning process. Too early and water is considered irrelevant, too late and the time for incorporation of a water feature has passed.
- ii) We would welcome information concerning the publication date for the Borough Council's 'Strategy for Art in the Public Realm'. This is a document in which water features – flowing and dry - will need to feature prominently.

**2. SPECIFIC SITES:****a) Fiveways/Clock**

As previously reported to the Forum, we are awaiting information about the Council's thinking for phase two, once phase one is properly completed.

We hope that the Leader is still mindful of his declared wish to regenerate our 'waterless spa' by kick-starting with a water feature at Fiveways.

We are completing our initial meetings with senior figures in businesses that ring Fiveways. Once this is done, and we have a draft design and some costings, we will be calling a meeting of interested parties to map out the way ahead.

**b) Union House**

We are pleased that Dandara is moving ahead with design and consultation and that a water feature is still planned for the courtyard to the south of Linden Park Road. We are less pleased with the design and dimensions of the water feature which is hardly 'iconic'. We will be seeking separate a consultation with Dandara.

**c) Calverley Grounds**

We give our wholehearted support to the initiative by the Friends of Calverley Grounds for a quality, water-themed play area on the bowling green. We will work closely with them and continue to encourage them to consider in due course the installation of a real, live water feature in the Grounds.

**d) Dairy Crest, St John's Road**

A local firm is drawing up detailed plans for a water wall in the internal courtyard. This should be clearly visible from the road.

**e) Knights Wood**

The same local firm is working closely with the Dandara team on detailed designs for the triangular, village-green inspired water feature adjacent to the main entrance to the

development. We understand that Dandara is seeking to commission a local artist for an emblematic piece of public art for the proposed 'village green'. On this too we will be seeking a separate consultation with Dandara.

**g) Carr's Corner**

This is a 'new entry' and follows up an initiative by Councillor David Scott at a recent meeting of the Joint Transport Board. We have been invited by KCC to draw up plans for a dry water feature on the roundabout. Any suggestions for designs would be much appreciated. We need something good to signal entry to the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

**h) Royal Wells Park**

This is the big one. Work here is proceeding apace. I am informed that the construction of the lower section of the cascading water feature is well under way.

**Finally:**

I am pleased to report that Water in the Wells has accepted an offer from Graphic Design Students at West Kent College to design a logo for us. We have been allocated two locally based students who have been provided with a design brief and are already getting to work. This is part of the College's drive to give graphic design students an opportunity to undertake real life projects for local charities. If they come up with something good, we might even consider commissioning them to work up a logo for the Forum. So watch this space!

I invite you to accept my report.

**Michael Holman - Chairman, Water in the Wells Working Group**

**APPENDIX B****Tunbridge Wells Town Forum Planning and Development Working Group****Update report for the meeting on 26 November 2015**

This has continued to be a very busy period for our working group and time constraints at the meeting on 26th November prevented a full report from the Working Group, as below, being made to members.

**Public Realm improvements**

We await notice of completion of the Fiveways scheme before making any formal comment. Some aspects of the scheme are clearly successful, notably the widening of the pavements using traditional brick pavers, the elimination of car traffic between 9am and 6pm seven days a week and the new bus stops by the Metro Bank. Other aspects are more controversial, notably the choice of grey materials for the main Fiveways area which are rather alien to the Tunbridge Wells vernacular idiom creating a rather bleak effect. This might be redeemed by the introduction of a significant water feature, which would be very welcome.

We understand that KCC Highways, who become responsible for long term maintenance upon completion of the scheme, dictate a rather narrow palette of materials which are acceptable to them in maintenance terms. This is most regrettable when applied within a historic town like Tunbridge Wells which has its own distinctive palette of materials. While the overall public realm concept of traffic calming and priority to pedestrians is greatly to be welcomed, the realised scheme should probably be regarded as a living experiment from which lessons can be learnt before proceeding further with other public realm improvements in the town.

**New Town Hall and Theatre**

Prospective plans for a new Town Hall in Mt Pleasant Avenue and two possible sites for a new theatre to replace the Assembly Hall (in place of the police station or on the Great Hall car park site) were presented to the meeting. Our working group previously considered the options presented for both buildings and has greatly welcomed the openness with which the TWBC Cabinet is consulting on its proposals. We believe that detailed planning for replacement buildings should in each case be subject to provisos partly identified by the Cabinet Advisory Board:

- (i) The architect's brief should include a statement that the new buildings should create a strong sense of civic stature and that they should not adversely affect the amenity and environment of Calverley Grounds; and
- (ii) There should be no final commitment to the project without first having a clearly agreed plan for the existing Town Hall complex and a robust financial plan for delivering the whole project.

We feel that if these provisos can be met, a new civic centre and a theatre would be welcomed by most residents and help realise Tunbridge Wells' ambition to become a destination town.

We note that the Council's financial appraisal suggests that the lowest risk strategy for delivery would be to link the construction of the two new buildings concurrently with redevelopment of the existing Civic Complex and this is something to which the Finance Working Group will no doubt turn its attention in the coming months.

### **RVP redevelopment**

Hermes, the owners of the Royal Victoria Place have recently exhibited their draft plans and taken the first step towards a planning application by seeking an opinion from TWBC that no environmental impact assessment is needed in relation to their proposals. Our working group has written to the developers welcoming the concept of redevelopment. We support the proposed general internal design and the larger retail units, the cinema and the improved restaurant and café provision and good links between elements of the new internal spaces and improved links to Market Square. While the remodelled Ely Court would include substantial natural light, we have suggested improvements further inside RVP where some natural light could be lost, though the latest suggestion from the developers is that this would not be so.

We are pleased that there have been improvements to the proposed external ground plan we were shown in October and that the proposed ground-plan treatment of the corner of Calverley Road and Camden Road is much improved.

We accept the need to demolish Calverley House. We could also contemplate the demolition of Camden House but only if replaced with a building of real merit. We do not feel that the proposed roofline of the proposed replacement building would be satisfactory and have asked for the whole design to be reconsidered.

We believe that 1 Camden Road sets the tone in projecting the special character of Camden Road in a way which would be difficult to improve and have suggested that, at the very least, the frontage should be retained or rebuilt to integrate with modern elements and with the retained Friendly Societies Hall, which will be fully refurbished.

### **Union House redevelopment**

While our working group supports the demolition of Union House rather than its refurbishment, we have serious reservations about the nature and scale of the proposed replacement buildings as presented by Dandara at an exhibition on 10th November. The massing of the proposed buildings would be overpowering on such an important site and the design is not of sufficient quality on this key approach to the town centre. The proposed new buildings would not satisfactorily close off the unique public space of the Pantiles, which is a place in town where people regularly congregate. The site has to fulfil expectations with keynote buildings of high quality.

We believe that a far more satisfactory design could emerge by closing off the hazardous London Road entrance to Linden Park Road, (which damages the enclosed atmosphere of the Pantiles) and bringing forward redevelopment to integrate better with the Pantiles. We also think that redevelopment could include the car park beyond Union House, though its legal status as a "Village Green" does raise very difficult issues. This would enable a much lower profile overall design while maintaining the 127-130 residential units which the town badly needs. We intend to engage actively with Dandara and the TWBC Planning team to secure a better outcome.

### **Local Plan Public Inquiry**

We have attended the November sessions of the Public Inquiry into the Site Allocations Development Plan Document which we responded to earlier in the year. TWBC is facing substantial pressure from developers in relation to future housing numbers and particular housing needs, such as C2 care homes. There is also pressure on the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the town's Green Belt from developers, made worse by the recent appeal decision at Highgate Hill Hawkhurst. A joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment recently carried out for Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells councils calculates that something like 9500 additional housing units

might be needed in our Borough by 2033 on top of the 6000 in the current Local Plan from 2006 to 2026, though it also makes clear that factors such as AONB, Green Belt and infrastructure provision may justify a reduction in that figure. TWBC officers have been defending the existing plan policies skilfully and all interests have been given a very fair hearing by the Inspector. There will be more hearings in December and we will inform members of the outcome when the Inspector's report becomes available.

### **Next presentation by the Planning Policy team at TWBC: 12th January 2016**

Following the very successful presentations by the planning policy team at TWBC in the summer, a further presentation will be given for Town Forum members on Tuesday 12th January in Committee Room A at 2pm. The layout of this room will facilitate the kind of useful round table discussion of policy issues which emerged in the summer. We are very grateful to Jane Lynch, Kelvin Hinton and their team for arranging this follow-up presentation. It is intended that similar presentations to the Forum would take place every 6 months.

### **Trinity Garden**

Trinity Theatre has produced plans to modify the recent rather haphazard developments in the churchyard including the gravel driveway which would be replaced by traditional brick pavers. While these draft plans are not a perfect solution, our working group felt that they represented a significant improvement over the present situation. They seem to set a fair balance between the need to respect the heritage assets in the garden and its relative greenness and tranquillity and the operational needs of the important cultural asset for the town represented by Trinity Theatre.

### **Proposed Aldi Supermarket**

We were invited to a presentation by Aldi of their proposals for a small 900 sq m supermarket on the site adjacent to and below the Spa Valley engine shed on Eridge Road. Although the proposed design is arguably of greater quality, given its intended use, than the concept designs for the Union House site, this land is scheduled for C3 Development under the Site Allocation DPD to provide approximately 37-60 dwellings. A scheme approved by the Civic Society for a mixture of houses and flats has already been granted planning consent but the site is understood to be in the ownership of Aldi who wish to develop it for retail purposes. There is therefore a planning policy issue which needs to be discussed further relative to this site.

**Mark Booker – Chairman, Planning and Development Working Group**