



**27 October 2011, 6.30pm
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells**

MINUTES

In attendance: (Cllr) Victor Webb (Molyneaux Park Road Residents' Association), Anne Forster (Friends of TW Library, Museum & Art Gallery), Carole Ann Barnes (Transition Tunbridge Wells), Christopher Thomas (Woodbury Close Residents' Association), Councillor Atwood (Guest), Councillor Bulman (Park Ward), Councillor Chapelard (St James' Ward), Councillor Crawford (Broadwater Ward & Vice Chairman of the Town Forum), Councillor James Scholes (Pantiles & St Mark's Ward) (County Councillor Tunbridge Wells South), Councillor Mrs Mayhew (Park Ward), Councillor Mrs Moore (St John's Ward), Councillor Ransley (Guest), Councillor Williams (Sherwood Ward), David Wakefield (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents' Association), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association), John Cunningham (Warwick Park Residents' Association), John Forster (Civic Society of Royal Tunbridge Wells), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), John Mattei (Royal British Legion Tunbridge Wells Branch), Johnathan Brooks (Friends of the Grove), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road User's Association), Katherina Mahler-Bech (Telephone House Neighbours Association), Lesley Herriot (Skinners Six Road Residents' Association), Mary Wardrop (Sherbourne Close Management Committee), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association), Michele Hull (Camden Park Residents' Association), Ms Phillips (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery), Peter Perry (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association), Sally Balcon (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Common)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from:

Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road), Anne Stobo (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Museum), Councillor David Neve (St James' Ward), Judith Farnie (Soroptimists), June Bridgeman (Soroptimists International), Councillor Len Price (Culverden Ward), Lorna Blackmore (Grantley Court Residents' Association), Roger Walsh (Upper Stone Street Residents' Association), Councillor Ronen Basu (Culverden Ward), Steven Marshall (Pantiles Traders Group), Councillor Trevor Poile (St Johns' Ward)

2. Membership Changes

a) Membership applications:

The Forum agreed the applications for membership, as set out on the agenda.

b) Changes of Representation:

The Forum noted the changes to representation of member's organisations, as set out on the agenda.

c) Notice of Substitute Members:

Philip Whitbourne substituted for Chris Morris (Beulah Road Residents' Association).

Anne Forster substituted for Anne Stobo (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Museum).

Peter Perry substituted for Betsy Dix (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholder's Association).

Agenda Item 4

3. Minutes of the meeting dated 27 September 2011

The minutes were agreed as a correct record.

4. Matters arising

4a) The Chairman stated that he, Michael Doyle and Chris Thomas will form a Finance Working Group to look at the TWBC draft budget and comment on the consultation on behalf of RTWTF.

4b) The RTWTF Transport Report was available on the website and titled “Getting Around Tunbridge Wells 2007”.

5. Oral reports from Councillors

5a) Transport Issues – Councillor Ransley

An update on transport issues was received from Councillor Ransley. During his presentation he covered the six priorities set out in the Town Forum’s Getting Around Tunbridge Wells 2007 transport report, and replied as follows:

Sustained Support for Public Transport

- A priority for Cabinet was providing transport for those without transport.
- The Cabinet was looking at completing the route for the 287 bus route, and was in discussion with the bus company Arriva. The proposed route would link in Pembury and Ranslye as well.

Restrictions on Heavy Lorries

- Cabinet understood that heavy lorries were an issue, but there were very few ways to mitigate this problem. There are no plans for the town in terms of a by-pass or ring road, and lorries were being routed via the A264 as the best route through town.

Reduction on Street Parking All Day and Enforcement

- All possible parking revenues were being looked at. Councillor Ransley pointed out that the Council received around £4,000,000 in revenue from parking, and this constituted a significant part of the budget. The principle that the user should pay of the service was being established, and if the Council did not charge for parking, council tax would need to be significantly higher. For other areas, such as Cranbrook & Sissinghurst, the parish council was considering taking on the responsibility for parking and keeping it free.
- Pavement parking was recognised as an issue, but the main problem was that the Police could not take action unless culprits were caught in the act.
- An expansion of a vehicle free zone was being considered with pedestrian friendly areas added. A one way system along the high street was being considered.
- The planning system needed to play a part in the process and the new Tesco development had included a park and ride and bus stop.

Agenda Item 4

Rail Links

- There had been an increase in train provision to London, with four off peak services now offered.
- A Gatwick to Ashford line was being considered, with a possible stop at Tunbridge Wells.
- Discussions about transport issues would take place as part of the Transport Forum, which would meet on 1 December 2011 at 2pm.

Questions asked by Town Forum members

- Q1 Unparished residents should not subsidise free car parking in parished areas. Would parish councils be expected to refurbish the car parks if they took on a car park lease from the Council? Councillor Ransley replied that they would need to take on a full repairing lease.
- Q2 Would the High Street and Mount Pleasant be considered for a car free/pedestrian friendly area, and what examples of this were there? Councillor Ransley responded that there was an example in Ashford where the road was a shared space. This slowed the traffic down to give more consideration to pedestrians. It had been very successful in other areas.
- Q3 Pavement parking was recognised as an issue in High Brooms, but was also an issue in Culverden Down, especially around school times. A shared space scheme on the High Street would impact on parking spaces available and the traders have objected in the past. Further issues included increased parking provision for the south of the town and congestion around the North Farm Industrial Estate. Given these issues, why did the Transport Forum meet so infrequently? Councillor Ransley replied that the shared space proposals were still in their infancy and he could not comment further on any implications of this. North Farm's traffic problems were being considered, with an alleviation committee set up with Greg Clark MP. Short term actions would be in place by November 2011. These would make only a five percent difference to traffic levels however. In the medium term a link road was being proposed and further dualing work on the A21. There was no additional money available from Kent County Council and a solution could be some years away. He was happy for the Transportation Forum to meet more frequently.
- Q4 The town has been gridlocked recently and the only realistic solution was a by-pass. Why could this not be sought as a solution, even if it was some years off? Councillor Ransley replied that this could be raised with Kent County Council, but it was their responsibility. Dualing work on the A21 could start as early as 2015 however.
- Q5 The traffic lights at Southborough were a key pinch point and traffic flow improved dramatically when they were out of order. Why were traffic flows not considered as a whole? Councillor Ransley replied that removal of the bus lane on Speldhurst Lane had been suggested to improve traffic flows.
- Q6 Was there anything further that could be done on pedestrianisation? Councillor Ransley replied that the Borough did not seem to be a high priority for Kent County Council, although any proposals could be put to the Joint Transportation Board.
- Q7 The Town Forum's Getting Around Tunbridge Wells 2007 transport report was excellent, but many of the issues were out of the Borough's control. Could the Forum have a timetable of

Agenda Item 4

works for the issues raised to keep track of progress? Councillor Ransley replied this might be possible.

Q8 Why was pay on exit parking charges not being considered? Councillor Ransley replied that the multi-storey car parks were unsuitable for this as it could create long queues when waiting to get out.

Q9 Why were parking meters not being considered? Councillor Ransley replied that on street charging was being reviewed.

It was noted that Kent County Council councillors received £25,000 funding for transport issues in their area, and residents could apply to their councillor for improvements to be made.

Q10 Efficient use by road users should be encouraged to increase road space, and promoting the use of taxis could be a way to provide transportation to those who did not have access to private vehicles. The overall provision needed to be examined and well organised. Oxford Council for instance had an excellent transport system and could Tunbridge Wells do something similar? Councillor Ransley noted that Oxford Council spent a great deal on bus subsidies, and said it was a matter of priorities for residents.

Q11 School children should be encouraged to walk and cycle more. What was the Council doing to encourage this? Councillor Ransley replied that he felt that one mile was a realistic walking distance for school children, but many were denied school transport because they lived within the limit of two miles. A campaign was being started with the schools to encourage other routes to school. However, many people did not like to walk or cycle in the rain.

Following discussions the Town Forum resolved to:

1. Write to the relevant portfolio holder for transport at Kent County Council, highlighting the issues raised, and the possible solutions. The letter would be signed by each association member, and the four County Councillors for the area.
2. Write to Oxford City Council for further information on their transport arrangements.
3. The Chairman offered to see Councillor Ransley regarding those points in the Town Forum's Getting Around Tunbridge Wells 2007 transport report that he could activate.

5b) Regeneration Issues – Councillor Atwood

An update on regeneration issues was received from Councillor Atwood who said that The Way Forward had recently been published as his plan to push regeneration issues forward. Dealing with Morrison's and the cinema site had been key issues, as was what people wanted to see provided on the civic site. Views on this site had been developed and it was recognised that the people of Tunbridge Wells wanted a cultural and entertainment offering, rather than further shopping opportunities. A new Advisory Panel had been set up to discuss these issues and would meet on 7 November 2011.

Agenda Item 4

Morrison's would be moving back to the site by Easter. Public pressure had helped with this issue and the store was proposing to improve the outside area in the meantime, and install CCTV.

The cinema site had changed hands again, and the new owner, Mr Bellhouse, was being financed by a large American finance company. The Borough Council had not been approached with any tangible plans as yet.

The Regeneration Company was considering development of the site at Cranbrook, but there was no possibility that the Tunbridge Wells Town Hall or civic area would be demolished.

Questions asked by Forum Members

- Q1 Where there parallels between the new Advisory Panel and the work of the Regeneration Company? Councillor Atwood replied that the work of the Advisory Panel would inform the work of the Regeneration Company.
- Q2 What progress had been made with the Kent and Sussex Hospital site? Councillor Ransley replied that an application for 357 housing units had recently been turned down, but it was likely that the NHS would sell the site for housing.
- Q3 There seemed to be lots of forums to discuss issues, but no real action. How much would a new cultural centre cost, and how would this be funded? What progress was there on the Compulsory Purchase Order for the cinema? Had young people's views been taken into account? And how would plans for the civic site fit into the deadlines for production of the Local Plan, which was the Borough's most important defence against inappropriate development in the area?

Councillor Atwood agreed that there were too many meetings, and some such as the LSP could be reduced. Details on the Compulsory Purchase Order were not in the public domain at this stage. Young people's views were important, and membership of the Advisory Panel was not fixed and could incorporate younger members. The failed civic centre redevelopment had a commercial store as the reason for development rather than an enabler, and the Council was keen to avoid this with any future plans. The Marlow Theatre had successfully regenerated without commercial funding.

The Local Plan timescales were tough, but he believed the National Planning Policy Framework was struggling with some fundamental issues. Until legislation and guidance was produced the Council could not even determine if their core policies were correct. It was a top priority however.

Forum members discussed the issues and noted:

Councillor Atwood had resolved the Morrison's site issue, and so it was felt that discernable progress was being made.

The town must have a Local Plan in place to prevent unwanted development.

Agenda Item 4

It was good to encourage young people to become more involved, although there were none on the Forum itself. There was a demographic deficit of 25-40 year olds in the town, and it was important to gain their views on what they would like to see in the town to stay here.

Greg Clark MP had highlighted that there would be transitional arrangements in place to protect councils when introducing a new plan.

The National Planning Policy Framework had indicated that 28,000 houses could be built in the Borough. This needed to be addressed by the Forum as the planning officers were not confident that the Borough could defend against this.

The buy-to-let sector was destroying the domestic market, pushing young people out of the market. This issue and building lower cost properties was critical to resolving many housing problems.

6. Report from the Town Forum Management Committee

A briefing note on the meeting with Greg Clark MP was circulated at the meeting.

7. Any other business

The Chairman stated that new Member's Packs were available for Town Forum members.

Traffic problems had arisen from road repairs on main routes into Tunbridge Wells, and it was noted that Councils could demand a timetable of street works in London to advise residents of any planned disruptions. Councillor Atwood said that Councillors were advised of street works in their wards but it was an unsatisfactory process.

A consultation paper on the Community Infrastructure Levy from DCLG was now available, and members were encouraged to respond with their views.

It was noted that KCC had been proposing to remove red brick paving in certain areas and replace with asphalt. This was not appropriate in conservation areas, and could be stopped if residents complained.

Date of the next meeting: 24 November 2011

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Agenda Item 5

TOWN FORUM FORWARD PLAN

November TF meeting agenda

1. Special expenses – Representatives from the Commons Conservators and the TWBC Parks department.
2. TW Advisory Panel – A member of the Advisory Panel to attend the meeting to explain the purpose and scope of the group and the process and timetable, and to hear from TF members on key points of concern.
3. The Courier's Town Carnival
4. TF visit to the Ice Skating – Social Event.

January 2012 TF meeting Agenda

1. Leisure and Tourism Strategy and plans for 2012 and Destination Marketing Strategy
2. Ice skating – Feedback on success or otherwise from Cllr Mayhew and officers, TF and local residents.
3. Draft Strategic Compass – Consultation with Cllr Atwood and relevant officers.

February 2012 TF meeting Agenda

1. Town Centre Plan - Advisory Panel – Provisional/final feedback on its plans.
2. TWBC Budget 2012/13-2016/17 and Medium Term Financial Strategy – Introduction and discussion with Lee Colyer and Cllr Scholes.
3. Vision for Kent Consultation – Strategic direction of the county and TWBC response to KCC.

March 2012 TF meeting Agenda

1. Transport Issues – Debate on why TW has been neglected by KCC for things that it wants: pedestrianisation, bypass, traffic management, but targeted for things that it doesn't want - digging up pavements and replacing historic lampposts.

April 2012 TF meeting Agenda

1. Town Centres Action Plan – Consultation.
2. Housing Strategy Consultation – The impact on unparished area and facilities.

Agenda Item 5

June 2012 TF meeting Agenda

1. Localism Bill and National Planning Strategy – Progress and implications for democratic structures in TW. What do we have to plan for? Gregg Clark MP and Democratic and Community Engagement Officer.

WORKING GROUPS

Finance – November to February

Library – KCC consultation late 2011

Assembly Hall/Theatre – ?

Museum/Art gallery – ?