



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Thursday 27 November 2014

Attended: Cllr Bob Backhouse, Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, June Bridgeman, Cllr Peter Bulman, David Bushell (sub), Cllr Ben Chapelard, Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Helen Featherstone, Jane Fenwick, Allan Gooda, Alex Green, Michaela van Halewyn, Tim Harper, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Sue Kaner, Kyrios Kyriacou, Katharina Mahler-Bech, David Morris, Marguerita Morton, Ken Norman (sub), Peter Perry (sub), Nick Pope, Cllr Catherine Rankin, Cllr James Scholes, Cllr Don Sloan, Anne Stobo, Alastair Tod (Chairman), David Wakefield, Mary Wardrop, Denise Watts, Cllr Lynne Weatherly, Philip Whitbourn (sub) and Cllr Chris Woodward

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Democratic and Community Engagement Manager), Lee Colyer (Finance Director) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Will Farmer (Community Engagement Officer, KCC) and Cllr Jane March (TWBC Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jukes, and from Altan Omer, Angela Phillips, Cllr David Scott and Cllr Frank Williams

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary, TWBC's Democratic Services Officer, reported the following change of representatives: (a) for the Inner London Road Residents' Association, Mr Pat Wilson had been appointed as the first-named representative, with David Wakefield as substitute; and (b) Will Farmer (KCC's Community Engagement Officer) was welcomed to the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2014, were presented.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2014 be agreed.

4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

25 September 2014

6 Tunbridge Wells Car Club

Transport Strategy WG *The working group be asked to consider the Tunbridge Wells Car Club initiative in detail and report their findings to the full Town Forum.*

The Transport Strategy Working Group will examine this in the new year.

8 20mph speed restrictions

Cllr Caroline Derrick *Cllr Derrick to circulate full details of the two pilot schemes to initiate 20mph zones.*

It was noted that these details had been circulated by e-mail on 1 October.

9 Purchase of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons

Management Committee *The Management Committee to send a letter to the Courier, setting out the concerns of the Friends of Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons regarding the actions of Targetfollow.*

It was noted that this action had been completed and the letter published by the Courier.

Sally Balcon provided a further update. She advised that the Friends group had submitted a bid, adding that those wishing to learn more should contact their Chairman, John Barber. Mrs Balcon advised that Targetfollow had subsequently challenged the bid. She also underlined the fact that, if the bid were accepted, there would be a significant undertaking involved to raise the sum agreed.

10 Green Networks questionnaire

All Members *All members encouraged to complete this questionnaire*

(See minute 8 below)

10 Site Allocations Development Plan Document

Various *(a) Housing targets; (b) Site Allocations timetable; (c) recent reports*

Cllr Rankin provided an update on the Site Allocations DPD process. She began by confirming the timetable for the 'submission' DPD document, advising that it would first be considered by the Cabinet (4 December), then full Council (10 December), before a further period of public consultation takes place from February 2015 and the DPD is sent to the Secretary of State.

Cllr Rankin emphasised that, as soon as the Site Allocations DPD had been submitted to the Secretary of State, TWBC would immediately embark upon a review of its Core Strategy, as required by the Government's National Planning Policy Framework; one of its key focuses, she added, would be housing.

Cllr Rankin felt that the town area of the Borough would face the biggest pressure to accommodate the bulk of the additional housing to be imposed, because it was surrounded by an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' designation, as well as a substantial Green Belt perimeter, within which a certain level of protection from additional development was provided. However, Cllr Rankin felt that there was already a presumption that certain parts of the Green Belt would be allocated for additional housing. She felt that the Town Forum should be fully aware of the risks and dangers to the town area of significant additional development as part of the Core Strategy review.

Sue Kaner also asked whether there were plans to review the Open Spaces Strategy at the same time, as it was clear that some existing areas would be under threat. Adam Chalmers undertook to raise this with the Planning officers and report back.

Action point: (a) Information on the review of the Core Strategy (process, timetable etc) be provided for the Town Forum in due course; and (b) Adam Chalmers to check on the timetable for the review of TWBC's Open Spaces Strategy.

13(a) Charles Whitbourn Emson portrait bust

Adam Chalmers to investigate the possibility of having the portrait bust displayed in the Town Hall for Remembrance Sunday.

Adam Chalmers confirmed that this had been achieved, adding that the bust would remain on display in the foyer to the Council Chamber for the four-year duration of the WW1 commemorations.

Alastair Tod advised that he would like to see the bust remain on permanent display in the Town Hall.

5. UPDATE REPORT FROM TWBC'S CABINET

Cllr Jane March, Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development, before providing an update on some of the key issues considered by the Cabinet since the last Town Forum meeting, introduced Liam Rogers from the Gradient creative and consulting company. Mr Rogers provided Town Forum members with a short presentation on an "Artists Unveiled" free exhibition, which was taking place across 17 venues in the town, from 1 – 31 December, where 30 local artists were showcasing their work, including art, performances, written work etc.

Cllr March reported on the following areas of interest:

- (a) The proposed Cultural and Learning Hub** – where negotiations were continuing with KCC over the viability of the scheme. Cllr March added that she would report back to the Town Forum on this topic early in the new year on progress;
- (b) Fiveways** – where construction work would pause at the end of the month and recommence in January;
- (c) Cinema site hoardings** – Cllr March advised that the Cabinet had agreed to invest £21k in promoting the Borough, through commissioning the printing and installation of high-quality photos to be applied to the hoarding on the Mount Pleasant and Church Road elevations. Cllr March added that the cost would be met partly from one of the Economic Development budgets and partly from revenue from night-time parking.

The Chairman asked where the images were being sourced from. Cllr March added that the parish and town councils in the Borough had been asked to provide some local images for consideration. Adam Chalmers added that the majority of the photos were from existing stock held by the Council.

Sally Balcon asked about the two existing rights of way across the site, specifically whether access would be maintained. Mr Chalmers advised that the Borough Council was aware of this issue and had been in discussion with the highways authority;

- (d) Assembly Hall Theatre** – Cllr March advised that the Cabinet had agreed that capital funds of £1.5m be set aside in order to provide some much-needed improvements to the Theatre, including air conditioning. She added that the Borough Council had also started to work with consultants in investigating the viability of providing a new theatre;
- (e) Chalybeate spring** – Cllr March advised that Targetfollow had commissioned an endoscopic survey of the Chalybeate spring, to determine if there were any blockages that were affecting the flow. The results would be shared in due course, she added.
- Cllr March added that TWBC's Environmental Service would be testing the quality of the water at the spring as well as at the cold bath, on Eridge Road, adjacent to the Common.
- (f) Grosvenor and Hilbert Park** – Cllr March advised that this improvement project was progressing well, with work to the dripping wells started, part of the proposed orchard being marked out and work on enhancing the skate park due to take place over the winter period;
- (g) Christmas train** – Finally, Cllr March reported that, subject to final safety testing, the Christmas train would be operational from the following day. She added that Marker Study would operate the train and the Borough Council would provide overnight storage.

There were no action points arising from this report.

6. TWBC DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2015/16

Lee Colyer, TWBC's Finance Director, provided a detailed report on the key issues impacting upon TWBC's proposed budget for 2015/16.

Mr Colyer pointed to the provisional government grant settlement for the authority, which would see a further cut, namely £697,000, representing a 16% reduction on the current year's level of support.

Mr Colyer drew attention to the latest budget projection for 2015/16, which showed that a balanced budget could be achieved, provided the staff savings and work streams set out could be delivered.

He added that, after the Cabinet meeting on 4 December, the proposed budget would be the subject of a full public consultation process. He asked that the Town Forum – either at its relevant working group or through individual comment – be involved at that consultation stage.

David Wakefield, as the Chairman of the Finance and Other Issues Working Group, asked Mr Colyer if it would be a helpful contribution to say that the Town Forum supported the balanced budget objective. Similarly, he asked whether it would be appropriate to comment upon the proposed 2% increase in council tax for 2015/16.

Mr Colyer advised that the table set out on page 31 of the agenda papers was only a projection at this point, ahead of confirmation of the actual level of government grant which the authority would receive. He added that this would be known after the Chancellor's 'Autumn Statement' on 3 December. However, Mr Colyer stressed that any contributions which the Town Forum wished to make during the consultation stage (4 December - 16 January) would be very welcome.

John Cunningham felt that two of the assumptions set out in that same table were speculative. He therefore asked Mr Colyer how confident he was about the forecast increases in investment income and the council tax base. Mr Colyer advised that the confidence level in those two aspects was high: the investment income levels were virtually guaranteed, he advised, and the tax base was one of the more certain forecasts.

Marguerita Morton sought further information about the £20m loan which the authority secured some years ago. She asked whether the interest the Council was achieving matched the amount it was having to pay to the Public Works Loans Board. Mr Colyer advised that there was £12m remaining from that loan, with the authority repaying £1m every six months. He added that the interest received on this outstanding loan was exceeding what the authority had to pay.

Sue Kaner referred to the £21k which the Cabinet had agreed to invest in the marketing initiative through the photographs it planned to have added to the hoardings around the cinema site. She asked whether it was felt prudent to spend this sum in this way. Cllr Jane March advised that the decision was taken in order to help achieve some of the objectives of the authority's Destination Management Plan; she advised that the initiative would help to promote the Borough as a tourist destination, adding that it was anticipated that the enhanced hoardings would remain in place for at least four years.

John Cunningham continued the hoardings discussion. He referred to a meeting he had attended in September, where he had been advised that David Bartholomew would be providing the photos at no cost but had now learnt that Mr Bartholomew would not now be commissioned to supply the images. Cllr March voiced her gratitude for Mr Cunningham's input into this initiative. She added that David Bartholomew had been originally commissioned, however due to some of the criticism which had been linked to this Cabinet decision, he had decided for his own commercial reasons to withdraw from the project.

Cllr Peter Bulman expressed his full support for the hoardings proposal, adding that the authority should do all it could to enhance the attractiveness of the town centre, especially the improvement of this prominent site.

Alex Green voiced his relief that the derelict cinema building had finally been demolished. He voiced his full support for the proposed hoardings initiative.

Marguerita Morton felt that the £21k sum proposed to be spent on enhancing the hoardings for marketing purposes could have been spent in a more effective manner, e.g. with improved leaflets, especially as the authority did not seem to have a recognised tourism budget. Cllr Jane March responded; she advised that the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group was leading the way as far as improved leaflets were concerned. She added that there was a separate tourism budget but that this formed a part of the overall Economic Development service figure. She reiterated her full support for the hoardings scheme as an effective way in which to attract visitors.

Michael Holman added his support for the hoardings proposal, but stressed that emphasis must be placed on high quality images.

There were no action points arising from this report other than encouragement for the Town Forum to respond to the draft budget during the formal consultation stage.

7. DRAFT CORPORATE PRIORITIES

Adam Chalmers, TWBC's Democratic and Engagement Manager, drew attention to a draft list of corporate/political priorities which the authority had produced for 2015/16, in support of achieving the objectives set out in the Council's Five Year Plan. Mr Chalmers added that, once the Cabinet had agreed the draft list, there would be a period of formal public consultation on these, between 4 December and 16 January; he encouraged Town Forum members to study the list and take advantage of the consultation process.

The Chairman, Alastair Tod, felt that the best way forward was for the Finance and Other Issues Working Group to take a lead on behalf of the Town Forum.

There were no specific action points arising from this report.

8. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – The Chairman, Michael Holman, voiced the working group's acknowledgement of the importance of developing a 'refreshed' face for the whole of the town's public realm. He added that this underlined the need to achieve a consistency which promoted the Borough's health, wealth and water brand. This, he felt, was of equal importance in the developments taking place on the periphery of the town, some of which were picked up in the following progress report:

- (a) **Fiveways public realm scheme** – Mr Holman reiterated his disappointment that this scheme had not incorporated a water feature at this stage; however, he was very keen to ensure that the contractors had included the provision of electricity and water services, to allow an easy link-up to a water feature at a subsequent point;
- (b) **North Farm roundabouts** – Mr Holman advised that investigations and negotiations were continuing, to try and ensure appropriate ducting was included in the building of the two main roundabouts as part of this scheme, to allow for the later installation of a water feature. He added that Cllr Scott was continuing to assist in this work;
- (c) **Knight's Wood** – Mr Holman referred to earlier discussions with representatives of Dandara, from which it had been established that the developer was supportive of the suggestion that a water feature be installed in the communal area at Knight's Wood. He added that plans and how this was to be funded were awaited;
- (d) **Royal Wells Park** – Mr Holman reported on progress with this scheme at the former K&S Hospital. He advised that detailed plans for a cascading water feature down the central spine of this development were awaited;
- (e) **Cinema site** – With plans for this cleared site to provide temporary Christmas parking being withdrawn by TWBC, Mr Holman advised that the working group was investigating the possibility of developing a small corner for a water feature. Mr Holman also asked if it were possible for some photos of Wiesbaden's water features to be included as part of the hoardings initiative, set out in minute 5 above;

- (f) **Pantiles Chalybeate Spring** – Mr Holman welcomed the statement made by Cllr Jane March that an endoscopic survey was being carried out, to determine the reason why the Chalybeate Spring was no longer flowing. He added that he looked forward to seeing the results of this investigation;
- (g) **Fountains Lodge BUPA care home** – Finally, Mr Holman reported that this new development had been officially opened on 12 November, incorporating a fountain, the three spouts of which were clearly visible from London Road – one of the main entrance routes to the town. He added that this was an excellent example of what can be achieved between the private sector and a dedicated interest group.

Cllr Catherine Rankin advised that TWBC would shortly be undertaking public consultation on an ‘urban design framework supplementary planning document’ (which was due to be considered by the Planning & Transportation Cabinet Advisory Board on 26 January, followed by Cabinet on 12 February 2015). She felt that this might provide the Town Forum with a good opportunity to press the case for more water features under any ‘public art’ element of future town centre development.

Mark Booker also reported on a very helpful meeting he had had with Michael Holman on the prospect of preparing a ‘water and rocks’ trail, as part of the work being undertaken by the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group. It was acknowledged that this was one more example of the cross-working group co-operation that existed within the Town Forum.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – The Chairman, June Bridgeman, had earlier circulated an update report, summarising the progress made by her working group since the last Town Forum meeting. From this report, members noted the following issues:

- (a) An invitation from TWBC to take a lead in progressing two initiatives set out in the ‘**Tunbridge Wells Souvenirs**’ report, namely: a chain of information points in shops and other tourist destinations; and the development of further, themed, itineraries for tourists and shoppers. A further initiative which TWBC had asked the working group to progress was the development of a consistent wayfaring signage strategy for the town, it was noted;
- (b) With the ‘**green networks**’ initiative, Mark Booker had thanked all those who had completed questionnaires and asked others yet to respond to submit their findings. From the update provided, it was noted that TWBC had indicated they wished to see a number of trails mapped and published. Related very much to that, June Bridgeman invited Town Forum members with either graphic art (capable of cartographic or map-production work) or relevant IT skills to join the working group and assist in moving these initiatives forward. The next meeting of the group, to which those with relevant skills were very much welcomed, would take place on Tuesday 9 December at 7.30pm, it was noted.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Transport Strategy – Jane Fenwick, acting Chairman of this working group, advised that her members had met on 3 October and a number had also attended the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) (TWBC and KCC members) and the Public Transport Forum. The key issues arising from the working group were:

- (a) Mrs Fenwick advised that the **Transport Strategy** was being presented to the next JTB meeting, taking place on 19 January, as the final version of the document. She

expressed the hope that the consultation responses had been adequately considered and the draft version of the Strategy thereby significantly improved. Mrs Fenwick invited Cllr Rankin to attend the next meeting of the Transport Strategy Working Group to talk on the issue of the transport implications of the additional housing that the Town Forum had been alerted to;

- (b) Mrs Fenwick advised that there would be a full public consultation process beginning in January on TWBC's draft **Parking Strategy**. Mrs Fenwick advised that her working group had welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Parking Manager, Rosemarie Bennett, some weeks before publication of the draft. Mrs Fenwick stressed the importance of the draft Parking Strategy including actions which (i) reduced congestion and (ii) saw parking revenue being used to support investment in updating and improving parking facilities;
- (c) Mrs Fenwick advised that, at **Carrs Corner**, KCC had installed a sign, intending to alert drivers to the need to slow down their approach to the roundabout when coming from the Bayhall Road direction. However, there was universal agreement that the sign was ineffectual, so more obvious measures were now being suggested by the working group;
- (d) **Co-Wheels**, the car share initiative launched by TWBC in September, had made a successful start, Mrs Fenwick advised. She added that TWBC was inviting the Town Forum to say whether there was a need for an additional vehicle, based in a residential area for instance, or any other feedback they wished to give. Stephen Bowser suggested that what might be helpful was the availability of something like an estate car, which would be capable of carrying bulky items to the recycling or refuse facility at North Farm.

Adam Chalmers drew attention to a pilot 'pay-on-exit' car parking scheme which was being run from February at the Great Hall car park for one month. He advised that further details were set out in the Local magazine and he urged Town Forum members to provide feedback on their experiences of the trial.

Mr Chalmers advised that TWBC was also setting aside funds to improve some town centre car parks, e.g. improving some stairwells etc.

Stephen Bowser asked what surplus car park revenue was spent on by TWBC. Mr Colyer advised that there were two distinct revenue streams: (i) on-street car parking, the income from which could only be spent on the provision and enforcement of such parking; (ii) off-street car parking, where the revenue could be spent across the full range of TWBC services.

Dorothea Holman enquired about Tesco's park and ride proposals and whether these would ever be realised. Adam Chalmers undertook to research and respond direct to Mrs Holman. Mrs Holman also raised the linked issue of the difficulties created by drivers using residential streets to park all day, free of charge, without regard to the impact on local residents.

Cllr March advised that TWBC had tried to secure some funds from the South East Local Enterprise Partnership to help introduce a park and ride scheme in the Borough, but, on this occasion, had been unsuccessful.

Cllr Backhouse advised that he was aware of Tesco's park and ride proposals from a Planning Committee aspect. The current position, he understood, was that this was not yet a viable scheme.

Finally, on the transportation issue, Cllr Rankin advised that TWBC's current thinking was to reduce the congestion on Pembury Road by examining the viability of widening the road, to allow for a dual carriageway scheme.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Planning and Development Strategy – Michael Doyle, Chairman of this working group, referred to the Site Allocations Development Planning Document (DPD), which had now reached its 'submission' stage, subject to Cabinet (4 December) and full Council (10 December) agreement. He expressed sympathy for TWBC's Planning officers facing, as they did, a review of the authority's Core Strategy, immediately upon the submission of the Site Allocations DPD, due to the implications of the Government's National Planning Policy Framework.

David Wakefield made a plea for the provision of the Site Allocations DPD in hard copy format, which Adam Chalmers confirmed could be provided, once the Cabinet and the full Council had agreed the final detail.

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairmen of this working group, advised that there were no items to report.

9. TWBC CONSULTATION ISSUES AND ITEMS OF GENERAL INTEREST

Mike McGeary had circulated a paper with the agenda in which items of forthcoming Council business had been listed, extracted from TWBC's 'Forward Plan'. This had been provided for information only.

Jane Fenwick queried why public consultation on the draft Parking Strategy was scheduled to begin over the Christmas and new year period, a time when most people had other priorities. Mr Chalmers explained that, whatever the official deadline for comments was, he would ensure that the full Town Forum meeting on 22 January had a chance to consider the working group's recommendations on the Strategy.

NB – Subsequent to the meeting, it has been confirmed that public consultation on the draft Parking Strategy will begin in mid-January at the earliest.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Wiesbaden and the ice rink – Michael Holman reported that, once again, Klaus Doessler would be visiting the Tunbridge Wells ice rink, from 12 – 14 December, where he would be offering Glühwein, Bratwurst and potato curls for sale. Mr Holman encouraged Town Forum members to visit and enjoy the German Christmas fare once more.

(b) Maintenance of sports pitches – Sue Kaner raised the issue of the recent Courier article in which the Foresters Football Club had been unable to play football on their home pitches, due to poor maintenance by the parks' contractor. She felt that this issue might benefit from some Town Forum input. Cllr March advised that the Foresters had been offered an alternative pitch, free of charge. Cllr March added that there had been further discussions held with the parks' contractor that day and that the position would be reviewed in the spring.

(c) Gatwick Airport development – Dorothea Holman enquired into progress with the latest consultation process re. Gatwick Airport and the proposed second runway. Adam Chalmers advised that the Leader of the Council intended to have a full Council debate on this issue, at which members of the public would be able to speak. Cllr March added that the Leader of the Council was attending a meeting on this topic that evening, at Hever Castle.

(d) 2015 centenaries – John Cunningham advised that there were a number of centenaries occurring in 2015, which he felt the Town Forum needed to be aware of and perhaps help organise events around. First, he advised that, in December 2015, it would be 100 years since the death of William Nevill, 1st Marquess of Abergavenny; secondly, 2015 marked the period when Belgian refugees settled in Tunbridge Wells, (adding that there might be the possibility of a joint commemorative activity with relevant families); and thirdly, October 2015 would mark the centenary of the accidental sinking of HMS Hythe in the Gallipoli campaign, when 129 local men from the 1st/3rd Kent Field Company, Royal Engineers died.

(e) Civic Society publication – John Cunningham advised that the Civic Society had produced a WW1 commemorative book, 'The shock of war', which was available from Waterstones and proving to be a very popular purchase.

(f) Parks maintenance – June Bridgeman asked that all relevant 'Friends of ...' groups be asked for their views, in any review of Sodexo's performance.

(g) Town Forum anniversary – Katharina Mahler-Bech advised that July 2015 would mark the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Town Forum.

(h) Health publications – Mike McGeary drew attention to a number of leaflets and publications which had been tabled, covering a 'choose health' programme, adult and family weight loss sessions, free health checks for 40-74 year olds and a 'parent and toddler' walks booklet, produced by the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 22 January 2015 at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 8.25pm.