



# ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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Thursday 28 January 2016

**Attended:** Bill Acker (sub), Bob Atwood, Caroline Auckland (sub), Sally Balcon, Lindsay Barker (sub), David Barnett, Cllr Ronen Basu, Lorna Blackmore, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, Beverley Brown (sub), David Bushell, Cllr Mrs Barbara Cobbold, John Cunningham, Shauna Dupuy, Andy England, Jane Fenwick, Alex Green, Cllr Lawrence Heasman, Sue Kaner, Brian Lippard, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Sally Manning (sub), Marguerita Morton, Cllr Tracy Moore, Chris Morris, Charles Pope, Nick Pope, Cllr James Scholes, Cllr David Scott, Cllr Don Sloan, Tim Tempest, Alastair Tod (Chairman), David Wakefield (sub), Mary Wardrop, Denise Watts and Pat Wilson

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

**Guest speakers:** Irene Fairbairn and Angus Stewart (item 8)

**Also present:** Cllr Jane March (Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development), Cllr Alan McDermott (Deputy Leader of the Council), Ann and John Pickering and Mike Westphal

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Cllr Bob Backhouse, Adrian Berendt, Cllr Peter Bulman, Cllr Ben Chapelard, Adrian Cory, Michael Doyle, Tim Harper, Michael and Dorothea Holman, Ann Hughes-Wilson (sub), Bill Kern, Claire Luxford, Cllr David Neve, Altan Omer, Peter Perry (sub), Angela Phillips (sub), Cllr Catherine Rankin, Kate Sargeant (sub), Anne Stobo, Cllr Lynne Weatherly and Cllr Chris Woodward.

### 2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary reported the following: (a) Michaela van Halewyn had stepped down as representative for the Calverley Park Crescent Association (Beverley Brown was representing the organisation at this meeting); and (b) the Town Forum's Management Committee had approved a membership application from the Friends of Trinity Churchyard. Charles Pope (1<sup>st</sup> nominee) and Bill Acker (substitute) were welcomed to their first meeting.

### 3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting dated 26 November 2015 were submitted for approval.

Katharina Mahler-Bech drew attention to page 18 of the agenda, specifically the reference to Trinity Garden. She disagreed with the statement "while these draft plans are not a perfect solution, they represented a significant improvement over the present situation". Mark Booker, Chairman of the Planning and Development Working Group, within whose report this statement appeared, advised that this was the view of the Working Group. He added that the summary of the Working Group's consideration of

planning matters had been appended to the Town Forum minutes for 26 November because time had not permitted any discussion on these issues at that stage.

The Chairman of the Forum, Alastair Tod, advised that if there were any difference of opinion on the proposals for Trinity Garden these should be taken up direct with those concerned.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2015 be approved.

#### 4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

26 November 2015

##### 9 Electoral equality and arrangements

Mike McGeary advised that the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been submitted to the Full Council meeting held on 9 December 2015. He set out the decision of the Council and had provided a link to the minutes of that meeting, for Forum members wanting to learn more about the different arguments put forward.

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

Cllr Alan McDermott, Deputy Leader of the Council, reported on the following areas of interest:

**(a) TWBC's budget** – He advised that central government was planning to cut TWBC's revenue support grant (RSG) by 49% in 2016/17, contrary to earlier indications, leaving the Borough Council with an additional shortfall of over £500k to fund the provision of services. In addition, while the Council had been anticipating its RSG to reduce to zero in 2018, the Government had also announced that its grant would 'go negative', by reducing the authority's baseline share of business rates. This too was contrary to earlier reassurances that there would be no change in policy before 2020 and undermined the Government's commitment to reward councils financially if they were able to deliver economic growth.

Cllr McDermott advised that strong representations had been made to Greg Clark MP over these grant settlement proposals, adding that some of the impact of this dramatic policy change would be temporarily mitigated through use of a 'grant volatility reserve' which the authority had established.

**(b) Cinema site** – Cllr McDermott reported that the Borough Council was very disappointed to learn that the owners of this site – the Carlyle Group – had decided to place it back on the market, especially after initial planning discussions with a prospective developer had been so positive.

**(c) Culture and Learning Hub** – Cllr McDermott reiterated the fact that nearly £5m of external funding had been allocated for this scheme (£4m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and £900k from the Arts Council). He added that a 'memorandum of understanding' had been signed that day, setting out how KCC and TWBC would work together to deliver the project; he also advised that the HLF had given permission for TWBC and KCC to begin work on stage 2 of their funding application.

**(d) Ice rink and pantomime** – Cllr McDermott advised that, despite the mild weather, over 34,000 people had enjoyed use of the rink leading up to and just beyond Christmas. He added that over 21,000 people had also enjoyed this season's pantomime at the Assembly Hall, a show which had received very favourable reviews from the 'trade' press.

Bob Atwood felt that the Cabinet update had been both helpful and encouraging, apart from the news about TWBC's grant settlement from central government. He asked whether, in view of the dramatic reduction in available revenue reserves, it might be prudent for the Council to defer its plans for new offices and a replacement theatre.

Cllr McDermott felt that deferment of these developments would most likely lead to greater scheme costs at whatever time the Council wished to proceed, so it might therefore lead to false economy to delay their implementation. He advised that the added shortfall of £500k in 2016/17 was a manageable position for the authority, because of its prudent financial approach.

There were no action points arising from this report.

## **6. PROPOSED RESPONSE BY THE TOWN FORUM TO TWBC CONSULTATION ISSUES**

David Wakefield, the Chairman of the Finance and Other Issues Working Group, had submitted a formal response to TWBC, following the Council's six-week consultation on its draft budget for 2016/17 and its corporate priorities for the same period. A copy of that response had been circulated with the agenda, for the endorsement of the full Town Forum.

Ahead of Mr Wakefield summarising the response, the Chairman invited Mark Booker, Chairman of the Planning and Development Working Group, to reiterate that group's views on TWBC's proposals for new Council offices and a replacement theatre for the Assembly Hall; this was a key feature of the consultation response.

Mr Booker advised that his Working Group was supportive of the proposals, subject to two key provisos, as set out on page 16 of the agenda papers, as part of the Group's update report dated November 2015. He added that, in part, these provisos had also been identified by TWBC's Cabinet Advisory Board, ahead of consideration of the matter by the Cabinet in December.

Cllr David Scott, whose professional background was in risk management, stressed the importance of TWBC keeping its options open while it progressed the scheme details. That way, he advised, members of the Council would have the full facts in front of them at the time when a decision needed to be taken.

Mr Wakefield then summarised the response prepared on TWBC's draft budget and corporate priorities, which had been set out in full on pages 19 and 20 of the agenda, to which the Chairman invited the Forum's response.

- Alex Green felt that referring to the Assembly Hall as 'losing money' with the programme it offered was missing the essential point. He believed that the Theatre, which received Council support for its operation, had a good record of investing in culture for the benefit of its residents and the town's visitors, adding that this was very much a worthwhile activity.
- Bob Atwood asked whether the premise that a larger replacement theatre would attract West End shows was still correct. He added that, with changing fashions, including touring companies that offered slimmed down productions, there was an

argument that a larger theatre was not necessarily a good investment. He urged that TWBC ensured it obtained the best consultant advice possible on this aspect, before proceeding much further. Mr Atwood also suggested that, if one of the key motivators of a new theatre was to attract visitors to the town, and therefore lead to greater prosperity for the Borough, this might be achieved through reducing parking charges.

- Brian Lippard felt that, with factors such as the continuing rise of 'National Theatre Live' (NT Live), the easy availability of theatre productions on-line, a cinema within the RVP complex etc, there might be a danger of a new, larger theatre being unused for significant periods. He also asked what the 'key milestones' (referred to in the Finance and Other Issues Working Group response) might be. Mr Wakefield advised that a key milestone was the need for detailed costings, especially how the funding gap was to be bridged.
- Mr Green responded to one of the above points. He stressed that the current theatre was not viewed as a competitor by Trinity, adding that he welcomed the proposals for a new theatre. He advised that NT Live – which had become a very popular part of Trinity's programme – was not seen as a threat to live stage performances. He also advised that obtaining the necessary licence to offer NT Live was a carefully managed process and he felt it unlikely that a similar licence would be issued for a second location within the town, such as a new theatre, because of the 'diluting' effect it would have on the product.
- Cllr David Scott was strongly of the view that, in risk management terms, it was important not to allow 'risk' to frighten organisations into inaction.
- Mr Booker endorsed the view about live stage performances, citing the success of the pantomime, with its 21,000 visitors.
- Cllr Jane March stressed the importance of the Borough Council's ambitions (set out in its Cultural Strategy) that: 'By 2024 the Borough of Tunbridge Wells will be nationally recognised for its vibrant cultural provision'. She added that a new theatre would attract much more than just 'large shows' and would continue to make a positive economic impact.
- Jane Fenwick stated that the public had only been able to comment on just the one scheme for a new theatre so far. She reiterated her view that other options should be prepared and made available for public comment. Cllr McDermott advised that a key factor with the option that had been widely presented was that the land was already in the Council's ownership, adding that its location adjacent to the Calverley Grounds offered the opportunity to link with events in the park.

Adam Chalmers, TWBC's Head of Partnerships and Engagement, acknowledged the significance of the Assembly Hall's 'flat floor' in terms of its ability to accommodate a wide range of events. He added that this element would be taken into account by the consultants with whom the Council was working.

Mr Chalmers thanked Forum members for their many comments on TWBC's draft budget. He added that he would ask the Director of Finance to respond to the points raised, once the Full Council had considered these – and other – comments at their meeting on 24 February.

Specifically on the comments made concerning the new Council offices and a new theatre, Mr Chalmers added that, at the December Full Council meeting, TWBC had made an 'in principle' decision to move to the next stages. He stressed that much of what had been raised by the Town Forum – the funding gap, success criteria, the need

for expert advice etc – was very much being examined and worked on. Mr Chalmers welcomed the Forum's appreciation of the openness with which the Borough Council was consulting on its proposals, adding that the Town Forum was viewed as a key consultee in the process.

**RESOLVED** – That the proposed response to TWBC's draft budget and corporate priorities, as set out in the agenda, be endorsed.

## 7. ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOGETHER

Cllr Jane March advised that Royal Tunbridge Wells Together (RTWT), the business-led town centre organisation, had been formally launched the previous evening. She added that the event had been attended by over 100 people from a range of businesses across the town centre.

Cllr March added that a total of £105,500 funding had been raised to date from business sponsors, the principal companies being: RVP, Cripps, Thomson Snell and Passmore, AXA-PPP, Fenwicks, Markerstudy, Targetfollow, Dandara, Berkeley Homes, G Collins and Arriva.

Cllr March also advised that two posts were currently being advertised, namely for a Town Centre Manager and for an administrator. These would both report to the RTWT Board which was being established. It was noted that RTWT would be a company limited by guarantee and a community interest company.

- The Chairman asked what benefits RTWT would be able to bring. Cllr March advised that RTWT had been responsible for a promotional campaign for the town over Christmas and additional festive decorations – particularly the Christmas tree at Fiveways. As for the future, Cllr March said that RTWT was looking at promoting the town more widely and at taking over responsibility for operating the Shopmobility scheme. Hilary Smith, TWBC's Economic Development Manager, added that there would be a focus on drawing together many of the existing town centre management partnerships and initiatives, to provide a more effective, co-ordinated approach.
- Cllr Scholes reminded the Forum that a formal Town Centre Management (TCM) initiative had been in place in the 1990s, adding that, after some years of success, it had lost its momentum and come to an end.
- David Wakefield asked for further details of the job description for the Town Centre Manager post. Mrs Smith advised that she could make the job description available, if anyone wished to view a copy. She stressed that the difference between the former TCM initiative and Royal Tunbridge Wells Together was that the latter would be business-led, rather than run by the Borough Council. Mrs Smith added that the role of the Town Centre Manager would be to build up capacity within the town, through drawing businesses together and finding out in a much more co-ordinated way what they saw as the priorities.
- Marguerita Morton said that she supported the aspirations of the RTWT initiative, adding that she would like to see how their collaboration will contribute to tourism in the town as a whole. She asked whether RTWT would be taking steps to market the town as a destination not only for shopping but also for cultural and leisure reasons too. Ms Morton also was interested to learn how much marketing expertise existed within RTWT. Mrs Smith advised that RTWT will promote the town centre as a whole and not limit its activities just to the retail sector. She added that many of the sponsors of RTWT were employers that were fully committed to the town. Mrs Smith advised that it was expected that RTWT would support the Council's Destination

Management Plan. She added that there would be some benefit in undertaking more work around 'business intelligence', to help increase marketing potential.

- Stephen Bowser recommended that the town centre management model in existence in Bury St Edmunds was well worth exploring. Mrs Smith confirmed that lessons had been learnt from TCM schemes elsewhere in developing RTWT. She added that some TCM schemes elsewhere had then often evolved into 'Business Improvement Districts'. Mrs Smith also reminded the Forum that an important next step was to develop a detailed business plan, which was vital in attracting further sponsors and associated members.
- Lorna Blackmore asked whether the £105k raised to date would be used, in part, to pay for the salaries of the two posts referred to. Mrs Smith confirmed that this was the case, adding that funds were also being built up from smaller businesses.
- Caroline Auckland asked how the guest list had been compiled for the launch. She added that she was part of a medium sized business in Camden Road and had been surprised not to have been invited. Mrs Smith advised that the invitations had been based upon a reliable contact list, adding that she was happy to update this as additional businesses became known to the Economic Development team.
- Cllr Moore expressed her full support for the RTWT initiative, adding that both the local authority and the Town Forum should be making every effort to maintain the economic vitality of the town.

There were no specific action points arising.

## **8. AIRCRAFT NOISE – PRESENTATION BY TWAANG**

Irene Fairbairn and Angus Stewart, leading members of the Tunbridge Wells Anti-Aircraft Noise Group (TWAANG), were welcomed to the meeting. They provided detailed feedback from that morning's report and meeting of the Independent Arrivals Review Team, which had taken place at Gatwick.

Ms Fairbairn advised that the TWAANG campaign had been started in the Autumn of 2015 to press for quieter and cleaner skies in Tunbridge Wells. The situation, she stressed, had become noticeably worse for many residents as a result of two factors: since late 2013, Gatwick westerly arrivals at the airport had been moved eastwards; and the spread of arrivals had been narrowed by more than half, sending aircraft, day and night, over Tunbridge Wells. Ms Fairbairn described the above developments in technical terms: she advised that, previously, aircraft would join the Instrument Landing System at a point between seven and 12 nautical miles to the east of Gatwick; in late 2013, this had been extended further eastwards to 14 nautical miles, requiring a wider arc to be followed and having much more of an impact on Tunbridge Wells.

Ms Fairbairn added that it was hoped that the 'continuous descent approach' would be raised from 6,000 ft to 7,000 ft. She advised that this did not take into account the impact on residents living on higher ground, as the target related to the height above the landing runway. It was noted that there was a recommendation in place to raise this height requirement to 8,000 ft.

Ms Fairbairn advised that there was a further recommendation that the fleet of A320 aircraft should have modifications undertaken in order to remove a distinctive engine whine. It was noted that the recommended deadline for this was December 2017, otherwise penalties would be imposed on the airline companies.

One further recommendation of significance was highlighted, namely that 'stacking' of aircraft be undertaken further out than at present, preferably over water rather than land. The report also stressed the importance of proper communications with affected communities.

Forum members raised a number of questions as follows:

- Stephen Bowser warned of the situation worsening, should Gatwick be selected for a second runway, with the number of flights likely to almost double. Ms Fairbairn added that such a situation would have a significant impact upon the relative tranquillity of the town.
- Cllr Ronen Basu felt that the Gatwick authorities should be pressed harder to say what the impact on air quality was when flights took off and landed. He added that when he had last asked the question, he had been given an inadequate response.
- Brian Lippard asked what the likely decibel level might be under the 'continuous descent approach' changes. He also enquired whether a second runway – if approved – was likely to change that decibel level. Ms Fairbairn advised that the probable decibel level would be 55dB, adding that she was unsure whether this would be any different with the advent of a second runway.

Angus Stewart said that he had concerns at the way that the aviation industry assessed aircraft noise, adding that it seemed that monitoring stations rarely reflected levels above 57dB. He hoped that parameters for registering noise might change in the near future.

Mr Lippard asked whether the 55dB level applied before or after the anticipated A320 aircraft modifications. Mr Stewart advised that this would be after the changes.

- Cllr Lawrence Heasman advised that he too had been at the Arrivals Review Team presentation. He understood that the A320 modifications would result in a 9dB noise reduction but at a high frequency level. He added that there remained much argument about the height changes. He understood that a change to 8,000 ft above the runway height would deliver a 6-7dB improvement. As for the monitoring of noise, Cllr Heasman felt that the equipment used was considerably out of date, adding that the establishment of an effective 'management board' in control of the process would be a welcome starting point.
- Cllr James Scholes felt that fining airlines for failing to meet height targets would act as an effective deterrent. Ms Fairbairn advised that there had been no such suggestion of this at the Gatwick meeting.
- Cllr Tracy Moore asked if it were known whether Gatwick planned to continue with their current narrow band for incoming flights. Ms Fairbairn advised that the recommendation coming out of the review was to widen the approach path but it was known that Gatwick would not support that view. The review team had proposed that the swathe of incoming flights be moved even further East, which would have even more of an impact on Tunbridge Wells, Ms Fairbairn added.

In summing up, Jane Fenwick, as Chairman of the Transport Working Group, thanked Ms Fairbairn and Mr Stewart for their very informative presentation. She added that she hoped that both the Town Forum and TWBC would follow up on what had been learnt, to respond to this growing concern for the residents of Tunbridge Wells.

Gary Stevenson, Head of Environment and Street Scene, said that John McCullough, his Principal Environmental Health Officer who specialised in noise nuisance, had attended the Gatwick meeting that morning. Mr McCullough would be preparing a report on the Review Team's findings and would be briefing TWBC councillors shortly, either in the format of a 'member briefing' or by means of a formal Cabinet and Full Council report. He added that this process would determine what follow-up action the authority might wish to take.

Mr Stevenson advised that he would keep the Town Forum members informed on progress. In the meantime, Stephen Bowser encouraged concerned parties to sign the petition that had been established on the Parliament website, urging more stringent restrictions on night flights at Gatwick.

There were no other specific action points arising from this presentation.

## **9. 20's PLENTY – ROAD SAFETY UPDATE**

On behalf of Adrian Berendt, Cllr David Scott provided the following update on the 20's Plenty road safety campaign.

- A working group had now been set up, which was due to report to the TWBC/KCC Joint Transportation Board on 15 February, with a final report to be made at its April meeting.
- At a national level, 20's Plenty was placing a particular focus on the non-metropolitan counties, such as Kent, for 2016 as it was felt that they lagged behind metropolitan and unitary authorities. Adrian Berendt would be speaking at their national conference on 26 February at the Guildhall in London.
- A 20's Plenty Kent umbrella grouping was being established, in order to bring together the individual campaigns and to challenge KCC's policy on 20mph, which it was claimed did not comply with Department for Transport guidelines.
- New 20's Plenty campaigns were starting in Langton Green, Otford, Tonbridge and Malling, Tenterden and Westgate-on-Sea, in addition to existing campaigns in Ashford, Deal, Sandwich, Thanet, Canterbury, Maidstone and Faversham.
- Maidstone Borough Council recently approved a motion to investigate more 20mph schemes.

Cllr Scott added that, in the St John's ward, some speed checks were being carried out, with the focus being on reducing the incidence of high levels of speeding. Mark Booker asked if there were specific streets which were being targeted. Cllr Scott advised that there were six streets within the Upper Grosvenor Road and Yew Tree Road area where the problem existed, an area which was not felt appropriate for 20mph limits, but where it might be realistic to successfully target high speed drivers.

Marguerita Morton asked if the far end of St John's Road could be considered, where there were currently junction improvements taking place. Cllr Scott advised that the key issue was safety and while the 20's Plenty campaign was concerned with the whole Borough, he was keen to achieve some success in the short term.



Cllr Barbara Cobbold asked whether plans to implement a 'speedwatch' campaign within her ward (Broadwater) would be a hindrance to the initiative taking place in St John's. Cllr Scott advised that any efforts to educate drivers and to tackle speeding were welcome and he encouraged any such initiative.

There were no specific action points arising from this presentation.

#### **10. FIVEWAYS PUBLIC REALM - UPDATE**

Cllr Ronen Basu, as the Cabinet Portfolio-holder leading on this scheme, advised that a very helpful meeting had been held with Mark Booker, to discuss the Borough Council's plans for addressing the outstanding concerns from the first phase of this scheme.

Mr Booker thanked Cllr Basu and Gary Stevenson, TWBC's Head of Environment and Street Scene, for the meeting, at which he had learnt that the remedial work would start in late-February. He added that an assessment of the impact on the town's public realm of the first phase of this scheme was already underway, in terms of both its use and appearance.

Mr Booker felt that the scheme had undoubtedly resulted in a much more pleasant environment in this part of the town centre. In terms of appearance, he stressed that there had been a number of successes. As was commonly acknowledged, there had also been some difficulties in implementation, due to either the wrong choice of materials or poor workmanship.

Mr Booker felt it was right to now consider the benefits of the next phase of the scheme and drew attention to the need to take account of the Cultural and Learning Hub's impact when devising the future plans. Mr Stevenson displayed an indicative sketch of the main features of phase 2, which would see the scheme move southwards, to link with the Crescent Road/Church Road junction. He added that the views of Town Forum members on this next phase would be very welcome, adding that certain lessons had been learnt from the initial phase. Mr Stevenson advised that the emphasis would be on discouraging traffic in this section of Mount Pleasant Road, adding that surveys would be undertaken to determine where existing traffic was travelling from and to. He advised that a bid of £1m had been made to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund and that a proposed £300k allocation had been included in the Council's draft capital budget, to fund this phase.

- Jane Fenwick asked Mr Stevenson to re-examine the signage within phase 1 for motorists entering the area from side roads. She felt that it was inadequate and lacked sufficient warning that motorists were about to enter a pedestrian priority zone. Mr Stevenson responded by reiterating that the current signage complied with the relevant guidance although he undertook to check whether any new regulations had subsequently been issued.
- Lindsay Barker asked what type of water features might be added to the public realm scheme. Mr Stevenson advised that, within phase 1, provision had been made for a water feature to be added, by means of a water supply and electricity, close to the Millennium Clock, although it was down to the Water in the Wells initiative to come forward with a design and funding, he added.
- Katharina Mahler-Bech asked if the pedestrian barriers, situated close to the Monson Road junction could be removed. She added that, to help mask their visual impact, the Tunbridge Wells in Bloom initiative had at least decorated the

barriers with some fine floral displays. Mr Stevenson acknowledged that the barriers were not a part of the original scheme design but had been installed as a requirement of KCC's safety audit. The expectation, he added, was that the barriers would be removed, as a result of phase 2 of the scheme generating less traffic using this road.

- Brian Lippard asked whether thought had been given to making Monson Road one-way. He added that the refuse bins operated by Pret à Manger were not enclosed in accordance with their planning obligations. Stephen Bowser added that there was also a lack of consistency with some of the litter bins and street furniture. Mr Stevenson thanked Mr Lippard for his suggestion re. Monson Road and added that this was an aspect which would be considered in discussion with KCC. As for the refuse bins, Mr Stevenson undertook to discuss the enforcement aspect with the Planning Service. He advised that the bins were, by design, different from those in the precinct area but the door locking mechanism was an aspect of concern, something which he would be taking up with the supplier.

In conclusion, Cllr Basu urged Town Forum members to share their views about phase 2 of the public realm scheme, through contacting either himself or Mr Stevenson.

## 11. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

**Tourism and Leisure** – Nick Pope, on behalf of the Chairman, summarised the work of this Group. He advised that, as part of the continuing close working with TWBC, both Cllr Jane March and Hilary Smith had been invited to the next meeting, as part of the continuing partnership approach on tourism and leisure matters. He added that the Group was also receiving regular feedback from the newly-established Royal Tunbridge Wells Together business group.

Mr Pope added that a questionnaire had been devised by several members of the Group on the topic of the 'visit Tunbridge Wells' website, with the aim of assisting TWBC in improving its content. It was agreed that Mike McGeary would provide the survey link for all Town Forum members as soon as possible. (NOTE: This was undertaken by e-mail, dated 4 February.)

As for other initiatives, the Working Group was keen to support the completion of the cycle path linking Penshurst to Tunbridge Wells, the remaining aspect being signage for the route.

Finally, Mr Pope advised that in the course of the next month, Group members would be involved in the revision of the Royal Tunbridge Wells tourism leaflet.

**Transport Strategy** – Jane Fenwick, Acting Chairman, referred to her written report, which had been distributed with the agenda. This had covered a wide range of key topics, including the effectiveness of the Joint Transportation Board, the continuing need for proper road markings leading to the Carrs Corner roundabout, the findings of the A26/A264 traffic study, TWBC's Cycling Strategy, parking, buses and aircraft noise.

**Planning and Development Strategy** – Mark Booker, Chairman, provided a verbal update on the issues which the Working Group had considered since the last Town Forum meeting. He began by summarising the issues covered at the latest presentation provided by TWBC's Planning Policy team, where updates had been provided on both the Site Allocations DPD document and the start of the review of the

authority's Local Plan. Attendees at the presentation felt there should be a more positively pro-active approach on development issues in the town so far as this was compatible with existing constraints in the planning process.

Mr Booker added that a model of RVP's proposals would be on display shortly, which would be of wide interest. He also advised that the Working Group had noted that the Aldi proposals for Eridge Road were not consistent with the current Site Allocations use for the site, adding that the case for another supermarket instead of housing (as currently allocated) still needed to be made.

Finally, the Working Group had been considering the proposals for Union House and remained unhappy with some important aspects of the new owner's plans. He added that a proper update on this would be made to the Town Forum in due course.

**Water in the Wells Working Group** – a written update report had been prepared by the Chairman, which had been circulated with the agenda.

One element of that report, Calverley Grounds, was updated by Gary Stevenson, TWBC's Head of Environment and Street Scene. He explained the reason behind the report's reference to TWBC not applying for an HLF grant for major renovation of the Grounds. He advised that this decision had been taken on the guidance of HLF's visiting officer, who had said that, because the Grounds were in "too good a state and area", it was not appropriate to seek funding from their 'Parks and People Fund'. However, Mr Stevenson added that the Borough Council was happy to look at an enhancement scheme for the Grounds, which could be the subject of bids to other HLF funding streams.

**Finance and Other Issues** – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that there were no further issues to report on, beyond minute 6 above.

**Culture** – Bob Atwood, Chairman, advised that he planned to convene the first meeting of this group shortly.

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

## 12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) **Friends of the Commons** – Sally Balcon advised that the Friends group had organised a litter pick of the Commons on the 4 and 5 March. She asked interested individuals and parties to advise John Barber if they wished to join in.

(b) **The Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday** – Denise Watts asked if any residents' groups were organising a street party as part of the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations in June. There was an indication that at least five groups planned to do so. It was agreed that there might be some merit in collaborating amongst the participating groups.

(c) **Friends of Trinity Churchyard** – Charles Pope asked if it were appropriate to have details of the Friends group's plans for the churchyard circulated to Town Forum members. The Chairman, Alastair Tod, signalled his approval, but added that there must first be discussions with Alex Green, Trinity's Executive Director, to ensure a co-ordinated approach.

## 13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 24 March 2016 at 6.30pm

The meeting concluded at 8.55pm.