

## ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

### Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 28 January 2021 held online starting at 6pm

**Members:** Carolone Auckland (Sorooptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District), Sally Balcon (Friends of the Commons), Tim Ball (Calverley Park Crescent Residents' Association), David Barnett (Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Parks), Jenina Bas-Pendry (Dudley Road Residents' Association), Adrian Berendt (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group), Lorna Blackmore (Grantley Court Residents' Association), Mark Booker (Culverden Residents' Association), Stephen Bowser (Residents' First), Diana Butler (Banner Farm Residents' Association), John de Lucy (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery), Helen Featherstone (Upper Stone Street Residents' Association), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Residents' Association), Margaret Ginman (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery), Carolyn Gray (The Forum), Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents' Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), Delphine Houlton (Hawkenbury Village Association), Valerie Le Moignan (Friends of Hawkenbury Recreation Ground), Brian Lippard (Civic Society of Royal Tunbridge Wells), Marianne MacDonald (Co-optee), Katharina Mahler-Bech (Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom and Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Ailsa Molyneux (Tunbridge Wells Puppetry Festival), Marguerita Morton (St. Johns Road Residents' Association), Veronica Segall-Jones (Tunbridge Wells Older Peoples Forum), Don Sloan (Molyneux Park Gardens Residents' Association), Dawn Stanford (Nourish Community Foodbank), Angus Stewart (Tunbridge Wells Anti-Aircraft Noise Group), Tim Tempest (Friends of The Grove), Adrian Thorne (Ramslye Residents), Alastair Tod (Poona Road Residents Association), Neil Williams (Warwich Park Residents' Association) and Carol Wilson (Inner London Road Residents' Association).

**Borough Councillors:** Councillors Ellis (St. John's ward), Lidstone (St. John's ward), Morton (St. John's ward), Pound (Sherwood ward), Rands (Culverden ward), Rutland (Culverden ward), Scott (Culverden ward) and Woodward (Broadwater ward).

**Others in Attendance:** Jane Beeley, William Benson (Chief Executive TWBC), Mathew Jefferys (Democratic and Electoral Service Manager TWBC), Councillor Mackonochie (Portfolio Holder for Communities and Wellbeing TWBC), Councillor McInroy (KCC Tunbridge Wells West Division), Angela McPherson, Noreen O'Meara, Linda Neusten (Census Engagement Manager Tunbridge Wells & Maidstone), Councillor Rankin (KCC Tunbridge Wells South Division), Natalie Samarasinghe (Executive Director UNA-UK) Chris Stevenson, Anne Sullivan and Mark O'Callaghan (Secretary to the Town Forum).

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1 The following apologies were received:
  - Anne Stobo (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Museum)
  - Ross Feeney (Royal Tunbridge Wells Together)
  - Denise Watts (Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum)
  - Councillor Nick Pope (Park Ward)
  - Councillor Catherine Rankin to leave early (Kent County Council)

### DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

- 2 The following substitutes were representing their respective member organisations:
  - Angus Stewart (Tunbridge Wells Anti-Aircraft Noise Group)
  - Ailsa Molyneux (Tunbridge Wells Puppetry Festival)
  - Veronica Segall-Jones (Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum)

## **MEMBERSHIP CHANGES**

### **3 a) Changes to Membership**

The following changes in membership were noted:

- Inner London Road Residents' Association – Carol Wilson was now the representative and Pat Wilson the substitute representative.

### **b) New Membership Applications**

New membership applications had been accepted from:

- Friends of Hawkenbury Recreation Group –Valerie Le Moignan was the representative and Pamela Lock the substitute representative.

## **MINUTES OF THE AGM ON 19 NOVEMBER 2020 (FOR NOTING)**

4 No amendments were proposed. The minutes were noted.

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 19 NOVEMBER 2020**

5 The Secretary advised that due to the minutes being accidentally overwritten they were not available for this meeting but would be presented to the next meeting.

## **UNITED NATIONS 75TH ANNIVERSARY**

- 6 Natalie Samarasinghe, Executive Director of the United Nations Association UK, presented:
- Last year was the UN's 75th anniversary.
  - Thanks to TWBC for bringing work of UN closer to the ground, to foster global solidarity and local action.
  - The UN held it's first meetings in London in 1946. It is founded on the basis that the future of the citizens depended on cooperation. In the middle of a global health emergency we need to address the issue of the engagement and cooperation of people.
  - Poverty and hunger are now on the rise and the global pandemic has worsened this; the Secretary General in response has asked for the anniversary to be treated as a moment of reflection on what is needed for the future and a survey has been carried out to study this.
  - Across the world the biggest priorities in the short term were access to basic services. In the long term the climate emergency was the biggest issue with inequality being the other big long term issue that emerged.
  - Global cooperation is vital to be addressed today which is more effective, open and inclusive. Thrilled to hear about action being taken by TWBC at local levels – for example the carbon neutral targets. We all have to adjust to a greener and digital future.
  - Two key constituencies of importance for the future – one is young people being instrumental to giving a public mandate with the hope that more young people will take on leadership roles as globally statistics are very poor being less than 2% in under 25s. Other key factor is the reluctance of local government taking action on issues that will impact nationally and therefore globally.
  - The UN anniversary is hoped to be a turning point for positive action to inspire local governments to take action just as TWBC are. The Town Forum can help by feeding back it's own learning experiences.

- People don't know how to engage with the UN directly, therefore improving communication and creating a dialogue is necessary.
- Feedback would be beneficial on: the best practice at a local level in order to be scaled up globally, how decisions are made in a way that is inclusive of local constituencies, what the town forum finds is working well.
- The UN works digitally as it's cheapest. Focus is often on the developing world but there are people in the developed world who aren't being communicated with digitally either and there are improvements to be made here.
- To engage older people the UN sought to ask older people how they are best communicated with then were offered as many routes – physical meetings, going into community and interviewing, phone calls for dialogues. They appreciate the social interaction and the time taken to build relationships.
- TWBC is keen to engage in the future especially with youth. UN – happy to talk to them about anything we can do such as hosting Model United Nations General Assembly (MUNGA) every year but funding currently an issue.
- There is a local UN association so liaising with them in the first instance useful.

## UPDATE FROM THE BOROUGH COUNCIL

7

William Benson, Chief Executive TWBC, presented –  
Covid-19 Update:

- The numbers are coming down and stabilising with Kent and are below the UK average with TW being lowest in Kent.
- Hospitals remain under some pressure with numbers there coming down more slowly than in the wider community.
- KCC has had police crime commissioner at meeting this week and is directing officers with further funding for push on enforcement visiting local supermarkets as these were identified as a possible source of transmission.
- Local test and trace successful. Door knocking suspended due to lockdown.
- Asymptomatic testing is being carried out with 140,000 tested across county and the positivity rate county wide is 1.1%, which is higher /lower in areas of higher/lower prevalence. Tunbridge Wells is at a 0.67% positivity rate.
- Asymptomatic testing proving successful in breaking transmission – recently a nursery worker tested positive despite being asymptomatic as was able to isolate and avoid further spread through the nursery. Further testing sites at Cranbrook and Hop Farm now in operation.

Vaccinations:

- Three primary care networks cover the borough – Tunbridge Wells for the town and West, Paddock Wood and Capel covered by Tonbridge and East covered by The Weald.
- TW Primary Care are doing very well with vaccination administration with a site at Abbey Court administering.
- The Prime Minister announced 'bumps in the road' with supply with surgeries having to distribute what they're given in the local area, which is more tricky for rural areas especially with Pfizer. Beginning to roll out home visits to those who are immobile and unable to attend designated sites.

- Update published today by CCG that on Tuesday the first large scale vaccination site in Kent opened in Folkstone and we're pushing very hard for other sites in the West.
- Patients are being called in the Weald area who have already had letters to book in for locations quite far away. Advice from CCG regarding vaccination is that you don't have to accept vaccination on distanced journeys when this itself presents risk and more opportunities will become available.
- Over 8% of registered patients vaccinated at last count.

Other Council business:

- Government say they are going ahead with elections so there are concerns about practicalities of this as TWBC rely on volunteers who are above average age and in surveys these volunteers have expressed concerns about being involved this year and there are also issues with venues and canvassing.
- Support for communities – continuing to man phones on Kent Together number and working with KCC on this, housing homeless people and keeping Everyone In Initiative going.
- Been handing out grants to businesses – approximately 10 grants now available. Any businesses wanting further info on this can be directed to our website or the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce.
- The High Street schemes we were hoping for delayed as Amey has been the victim of a ransomware attack.
- Works have started at cinema site – developer is making sure they retain planning commission by commencing works but we've raised the outstanding £100k for Section 106.
- We will be taking budget to full council next month – papers are available on council website. Pandemic has been devastating financially - our net revenue budget is £13 million per month and TWBC were initially losing £1 million with a projected budget deficit of over £3million for next year.
- We have consulted and agreed to use reserves for this year and next and monitor recovery and what this means to budget.
- Local Plan – discussions internally and pre-submission, the local plan has been passed through to CAB. For Town centre this is good news as development is concentrated on new garden community and the expansion of Paddock Wood. Further consultation and process necessary on this.

Town Centre recovery:

- Councillor Catherine Rankin (Kent County Council) has put money towards High Street scheme as have the Business Improvement District which is hoped to be approved soon.
- Town centre plan to follow after local plan has been approved and Town Forum will be important consultee on this.
- TW Works – the way people are working in the future will change. There is a danger of some businesses downsizing with AXA marketing one of their premises. But there is also an opportunity for people who were commuting to London to work locally. TW being promoted as a place to do business locally and nationally. 2-3 days per week of office working seems realistic.

Other Matters:

- Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Service (DAVSS) experiencing challenges with funding – been pressing Police and Crime Commissioner for longer funding, answer is funding cannot be guaranteed past a yearly settlement.

Veronica Segall-Jones (Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum) reported:

- The Forum has conducted a survey of older residents on their experiences during lockdown which was carried out in the Summer months and findings are mixed.
- Positives reported were that the local community and neighbours were checking in to find out how people were doing which made a big difference and the lack of traffic and air traffic was found to be pleasant and much more tranquil.
- Major concerns were in their abilities to take part in the limited society that was there and the biggest challenge was with I.T. Without technology many would have been without contact from family and friends but there were a number who couldn't use IT at all, but those who were using it increased in number.
- Some raised the issue of being able to afford technologies or having the eyesight to do so but biggest factor putting people off using tech was threat of scams and malware.
- People wanted more I.T. training schemes and there is a positive drive of wanting to embrace technology.
- Immediate effect of I.T. use was that of shopping – those who couldn't go out and shop and needed to shop online had issues either with not being able to register or use online shopping. In addition this was the one time when older people felt there was a dislocation between the need of primary healthcare but not being able to get GP appointments so older people were finding it very difficult to access care as appointments were oversubscribed and being carried out by video call.
- Since then across the board services have improved so looking to carry out another survey which will include info on receipt of vaccines.

## **PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY**

8 Jane Fenwick, Town Forum Transport Strategy Working Group, presented:

- Briefing papers should have been received.
- Last year a short but well used path used as a short cut to Birling Road and Warwick Park was threatened and residents were surprised to discover it was not a public right of way and therefore had no protection. The local residents opposed the planning application and applied to have protection put in place on the pathway for future use which is believed to have been successful.
- We're now asking for volunteers to try to ascertain whether other pathways may have been missed.
- The town has been divided into six areas and there is a map issued by KCC showing Twittens by area. Being local is important as local knowledge import.
- People should check maps online at home but when out walking taking regular exercise during lockdown it is asked that you can check if there are any missing signs or overgrowth.
- Any footpaths not highlighted on the provided map should be reported to ascertain which footpaths are important and potentially under threat.
- Any paths unclaimed by 2026 will be lost permanently if not identified.
- Volunteers should contact Jane Fenwick for more information.

KCC have just issued a consultation on a new road safety strategy which is entitled 'Vision Zero' which aims for zero fatalities on Kent roads by 2050.

The Town Forum will be putting in a response with comment soon this so please send comments to Jane Fenwick for submission.

## **CENSUS 2021**

- 9 Linda Neusten, Census Engagement Manager Tunbridge Wells & Maidstone, presented:
- In approx. six weeks-time there will be a census to survey the population.
  - The Act of Parliament from 1921 states this is a legal requirement to be carried on how people live – household types, no. of rooms, energy used, occupant ages and occupations. Every ten years this is reviewed.
  - The purpose is to inform planning and the allocation of finance at all levels from central to local government and the services in each area. It serves also as a vehicle to monitor social change and inform change.
  - March 21st is date of census which will go ahead regardless of lockdown. ONS staff have been given critical worker status and will be working to latest gov advice in terms of engaging – no one will be entering anyone's homes and will be respecting the 2 metre rule.
  - It is hoped that most households engage digitally however paper questionnaires are available on request from ONS which can be delivered.
  - From 1st March household packs will be delivered containing as access code for completing online.
  - Three new questions this time around – on past service in armed forces to identify needs of veterans and resources required for them, with the other two new questions being voluntary and relate to gender identity and sexuality.
  - Some people will be in shared households and they can access their own form individually and separately from the rest of the household.
  - Help will be available online in the form of chat and email and census support offices will be in place in the local area; in Tunbridge Wells there will be two offices – one in the Citizen's Advice Service in Royal Victoria Place and another in Cranbrook. Field workers will be easily identifiable in uniform.
  - 46 foreign language translations are available and also braille, easy-read and sign language format.
  - Data is kept safe and protected by law. Name and address used in the same way as ballot – proof of participation and avoidance of fraud.
  - Findings will be stored for 100 years. More information in local press to follow.
  - It is aimed to reach as much of the population as possible to inform future services.

## **UPDATES FROM MEMBER ORGANISATIONS**

- 10 None.

## **REPORTS FROM THE TOWN FORUM WORKING GROUPS**

- 11 Planning:
- Written report to be forwarded regarding Local Plan and the written report will go into more detail on that.

- We've responded jointly with the civic society on the government's consultation on the White Paper and have responded critically to government proposals to widen permitted development to enable the conversion of retail and commercial premises to resident use without planning permission and in our town this could potentially be a worrying development.
- The report can be circulated but some of it is arcane, without the consultation document it makes for difficult reading, needs associated documents to make it more comprehensive.

#### Transport Strategy:

- Meeting on Monday 1 February, report to follow then.

#### Culture, Leisure and Tourism:

- Statement given from Anne Stobo (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Library, Museum and Art Gallery) regarding the restoration of a Georgian gown on which the Friends are coordinating with staff at the Amelia Scott.
- They set out to raise £10k which has now been achieved. They have had two significant awards from Daffney Boullard trust £1k, Leck Trust £1500, Royal TW Civic Society £250 Tunbridge Wells, Tunbridge Wells Inner Wheel £100.
- Poppy Singer in St Albans will be carrying out conservation work. Anna Spender, Assets and Collection Manager at Amelia Scott is currently discussing start date of work. Left over money raised will go towards to conservation of an 18th century suit which accompanies the gown and will become the new project.
- It has been brought to the attention of the working group that the recently formed Decamus Burton Society had published it's first journal for members. You have to be a member to obtain a copy of the journal. Details on joining are on their website. The first journal contains details of a hoped Decamus Burton museum in Tunbridge Wells with the proposed site at the two existing Calverley Terrace buildings on Crescent Road.
- Pump Room – Will come into service in March being run by a management group with details to follow but discussions on this are still ongoing. The Pump Room would be a valuable resource for local organisations and exhibitions.

#### Wellbeing:

- Nourish published data for last financial year April 2019 to March 2020 which only covers the first week of Covid-19, numbers of referrals were up by 45% so for first time helped over 10k people in the borough last year. In total 91k meals provided.
- 48% were children under age of 18, 4,300 referrals taken in and majority of people only needed 3 or 4 food bags. 24% referred for benefit changes, 15% domestic abuse, not much change in figures except slight increase in more referrals for debt related issues.
- Nourish have moved from a three day week to a five day week to keep up with demand. Covid-19 has worsened an already existing situation. Community support has been overwhelming this year.

#### Water in the Wells:

- In addition to the functioning water features in Knights Wood, Fountains Lodge in Southborough and two in Berkeley Homes, there

is a new water feature with sculpture in the new Pantiles 1877 development. Problems with inscription as this stated “ascending from above” so this has been covered with a planter and will be replaced by Dandara. There will be a formal opening at some point after phase one is complete but the sculpture and water feature is already lit up at night and can be seen from the Eridge Road. Lovely to have a reminder of the history of Tunbridge Wells in the area.

- £10k is set aside for an artwork drinking water fountain to be installed in the courtyard at the Amelia Scott building; applications for this are being submitted currently.

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

12                None.

## **FUTURE MEETINGS**

13                18 March 2021  
                     17 June 2021  
                     16 September 2021  
                     11 November 2021 (AGM)