



MINUTES - **Thursday 28 June 2012**

**Attended:** Sally Balcon, David Barnett (sub), Stephen Bowser, June Bridgeman, Johnathan Brooks, Cllr Peter Bulman, Cllr Ben Chapelard, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Jane Fenwick, Maggie Fraser, Léonie Harrington, John Higgs, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Kyrios Kyriacou, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew, Chris Morris, David Morris, Marguerita Morton, Ian Naismith, Altan Omer, Angela Phillips, Kate Sergeant, David Wakefield (Chairman), Mary Wardrop, David Webster, Philip Whitbourn and Cllr Frank Williams

**33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Chairman reminded Forum members that John Goodfellow had sadly passed away earlier in the month. Forum members paid their respects in observing a minute's silence and reflected on the contribution John had made towards the town's civic life and the significant role he had undertaken in support of the Town Forum's work.

Apologies for absence were reported from: Lorna Blackmore, Helen Featherstone, John Forster, Sue Kaner, J Paul Lambert, George Lawson, John Mattei, Anne Stobo, Chris Thomas and Councillors Basu, Neve, Poile, Rogers, Scott and Woodward.

**34. DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

John Cunningham declared he was substituting for John Forster but was also present as the primary representative of the Warwick Park Residents' Association. David Barnett declared he was substituting for J Paul Lambert.

**35. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - APPLICATIONS**

Jane Fenwick advised that a newly-formed group, the Friends of Calverley Grounds, wished to become members of the Town Forum. The Chairman advised that, under the provisions of the Forum's constitution, he had approved the application. Jane Fenwick, who had been appointed as the Secretary of the new group, advised that their Chairman was Jim Kedge. She added that, one of the group's key priorities was to consult and help determine a suitable use for the former bowls pavilion in the Grounds. She welcomed ideas and proposals from Forum members.

**36. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2012 be agreed.

**37. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

24 May 2012

26 Representative on the Public Transport Forum

**Resolved** – That, in view of the loss of John Goodfellow, Sue Kaner be appointed as the permanent Town Forum representative on the Public Transport Forum.

29 Consultation on empty homes

*DW The Chairman to respond to the Empty Homes Policy consultation draft, summarising the Town Forum's views.*

Mike McGeary had earlier notified the Chairman that because the deadline for comments had been within six working days of the previous meeting, there had been insufficient time to submit the Town Forum's views on this TWBC consultation issue.

30 Commissioning Plan for Education Provision 2012-17

*MM Marguerita Morton and Helen Featherstone to study KCC's consultation paper on the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision 2012-17 and prepare a response, for the Chairman's approval and submission.*

The Chairman advised that this would be covered as a substantive issue, under item 7 on the agenda.

31 Forecourt parking in the St James' (north) area

*DW The Chairman to submit a response to the Planning Service, setting out the Town Forum's support for TWBC's Article 4 initiative.*

The Chairman confirmed that he had submitted a response on the Forum's behalf.

32a Local heritage assets

*JC John Cunningham to register to speak at the Cabinet meeting on 14 June, to emphasise the Town Forum's views on this consultation paper.*

John Cunningham apologised for having missed the deadline date for registering to speak at the Cabinet meeting. However, he advised that as this had only been one stage in the consultation process, a further opportunity would exist for the Forum's views to be taken into account. He urged, therefore, that the Town Forum maintain a watching brief on this issue.

### **38. THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE TOWN FORUM**

The Chairman introduced this issue by drawing attention to the summary report which had been e-mailed out to members the previous day, which contained a list of the key issues raised by members on behalf of the organisations they represented on the future role of the Town Forum.

The Chairman also read out the 'key themes' from the submissions made, which had been a supplementary piece of information, namely:

- (a) 55% of respondents had a preference for option 7 to be followed;
- (b) 15% had signalled a preference for option 2, rising to 24% when a combination of options had been specified as a preference;
- (c) 36% of respondents had raised the issue of concern about the need for greater engagement from TWBC ward members with the Forum;
- (d) 63% of respondents saw continued TWBC administrative support as essential;

- (e) 30% of respondents had called for currently un-represented areas to have a presence on the Forum; and
- (f) 30% of respondents had acknowledged that work undertaken by working groups in between meetings was an important element in the Forum's effectiveness.

The Chairman reminded the group that, as agreed at the last meeting, the purpose of this summary report was to enable the Town Forum to select two of the original options for further, detailed work to be undertaken over the following two months. This would lead to a final decision being taken at the 27 September meeting, to adopt an agreed future role, for implementation from the October annual meeting onwards.

To assist the Forum in determining the best way forward – and conscious of the statistic in point (d) above – Michael Holman asked which of the seven options would not attract continued TWBC administrative support. Mike McGeary advised that options 1, 5 and 6 could not be supported administratively by TWBC. It was noted that, in addition, there was only a very limited amount of support for option 5, i.e. the beginning of the process towards seeking town council status.

The Chairman also advised that he had enquired if TWBC would be able to assist with the development of the Forum's website but had been advised that capacity within the authority did not exist to be able to help. On the issue of the website, Michael Holman felt it of equal importance that the Town Forum consider how it presented and projected itself positively.

Councillor Bulman stressed that, as far as he was concerned, he would insist on the Council providing administrative officer support for whatever format the Town Forum eventually became as a result of this review.

The Chairman thanked all members of the Forum who had responded to the questionnaire and who had contributed to the debate on this issue. He advised that the Town Forum management team, comprising Michael Doyle, Jane Fenwick, Michael Holman and himself, now had sufficient guidance as to how to develop this process. From the responses provided, there was a clear preference for options 2 and 7 being used as the basis for more detailed proposals to be worked up, he added.

Michael Holman felt that the two options were not mutually exclusive, adding that option 7 – as set out – did not properly address the issue of structure, i.e. the mix of full (plenary) Town Forum meetings and the benefit of working groups. He believed that all members should be given the chance to put forward their views on how to amalgamate the best features of options 2 and 7, as part of the next stage.

In accepting this suggestion, the Chairman advised that the management team would begin work on the next stage, for presentation to the 26 July meeting, where further feedback and comments would be sought. That, he added, should enable a final decision to be taken at the 27 September meeting, in accordance with the timetable already agreed.

The following important aspects would be highlighted at that stage, the Chairman advised:

- (i) the working groups would be identified and agreed and members would be invited to indicate which ones they would like to serve on;

- (ii) secondly, the issues of website development and publicity would need to be agreed upon; and
- (iii) there would need to be clarity over the process by which TWBC received recommendations from the Town Forum and how they responded.

**Action – Management Team**

- (1) The Town Forum management team to develop proposals for the future role of the Forum, based upon the feedback already provided, namely a model built around options 2 and 7;
- (2) The above work to be supported by TWBC;
- (3) The management team to report to the 26 July meeting on progress, which will include: (a) the structure of full Town Forum meetings and working groups; (b) website development; (c) how to improve the Forum's publicity role; and (d) a process for how TWBC will respond to reports and recommendations agreed by the full Forum.

**39. KCC'S COMMISSIONING PLAN FOR EDUCATION PROVISION 2012-17**

As referred to above, under minute 37, the Chairman thanked Marguerita Morton, Helen Featherstone, Sally Balcon and Mary Wardrop for their collaborative work in responding to the above consultation paper.

Marguerita referred Forum members to a copy of the response, the full content of which had been circulated with the agenda papers. Due to KCC's tight deadline, the response had been approved by the Chairman ahead of this meeting and submitted to KCC by 19 June.

Marguerita summarised the key issues set out in the response; she added that a considerable amount of additional research had been conducted by the four volunteers, in order to test KCC's forecasting model, which was not, they felt, based upon reliable evidence in some cases, e.g. the number of low income families in the Borough and the failure to take account of the actual deficit in provision of places at specific over-subscribed primary schools.

A detailed response had been made under each of the following key headings, namely: funding; travelling distances; overcrowding; early years provision; special educational need; and post-16 education.

In acknowledging the thorough work which had been undertaken, Jane Fenwick enquired whether a copy of the response had been sent to the six county councillors representing the Tunbridge Wells Borough. Léonie Harrington, KCC's Community Engagement Officer, undertook to forward this to the six councillors.

Dorothea Holman enquired how this issue would be followed up, adding that maybe there was a need to seek some press coverage for what the Forum had achieved. The Chairman undertook to discuss this direct with the Courier's Chief Reporter, Mary Harris.

Finally, Mary Wardrop expressed regret that KCC had not included head teachers in the town as part of this consultation process; she felt that their input, experience and knowledge would have added much value to the outcome.

## **Actions**

- LH (1) Léonie Harrington, KCC's Community Engagement Officer, to forward a copy of the Town Forum's response to the six county councillors in the Tunbridge Wells Borough; and
- DW (2) The Chairman to contact Mary Harris at the Courier, to encourage press coverage of the Town Forum's consultation response.

## **40. MATTERS ARISING FROM 24 MAY 2012 MINUTES**

### **40a Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery**

The Chairman reported that he had been advised that TWBC's Cabinet had approved funding for the installation of a lift in Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery.

### **40b Town Plan Panel**

Philip Whitbourn was invited to provide an update report on the work of the Town Plan Panel. He advised that a copy of the Panel's report had now been produced, setting out their views and recommendations, which would be fed into TWBC's Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP) process in the Autumn.

It was agreed that it would be very helpful to the Town Forum if a presentation on the Panel's findings could be made at their 26 July meeting and the Chairman undertook to discuss the possibility of this taking place, direct with the Panel's Chairman, Bob Atwood.

Michael Holman asked if Forum members could be provided with access to the Panel's report, either in advance of the presentation or as part of it, which the Chairman undertook to discuss with Mr Atwood.

### **Action**

- DW The Chairman to contact Bob Atwood, Chairman of the Town Plan Panel, to request that a presentation be made on their findings to the 26 July meeting.

## **41. WATER IN THE WELLS WORKING GROUP – UPDATE REPORT**

Michael Holman, Chairman of the above working group, provided Forum members with a verbal update report on progress.

He advised that a variety of channels was being used, to bring the aims of the group to the attention of key agencies, developers etc working in the town. He added that discussions had also been held with KCC members and with a young architect associated with similar schemes, who now lived in the Borough.

Michael added that a photographic dossier would next be produced, which would form part of a powerpoint presentation, covering all of the identified sites, which included: the redevelopment of the K&S Hospital site (where an encouraging response had already been provided by the developers, Berkeley Homes); Calverley Grounds; Brighton Lake; and Fiveways.

Michael reported that it was intended to submit a progress report to both the Council's lead officer on the TCAAP process and to the Town Plan Panel.

He also sought assistance in securing the services of a solicitor qualified in charity law, who could assist in the drawing up of a legal instrument, which would allow the Forum to raise and spend money in the development of this project.

Michael was thanked for his very positive progress report, the Chairman adding that he felt the Berkeley Homes option looked to be the most promising.

#### **42. PUBLIC EXHIBITION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE KENT AND SUSSEX HOSPITAL SITE**

The Chairman reported that he had visited the public exhibition hosted by Berkeley Homes on their proposals for the redevelopment of the Kent and Sussex Hospital site. His view was that, generally, the proposed reduction in housing development was welcome, but he expressed concern about the impact that vehicle movement would have.

Dorothea Holman added that, while she was generally supportive of the proposal, she had concerns that there were no plans for a new school within the site, despite the obvious additional demand for education provision which young families moving to the area would bring.

At this point, the Chairman introduced Marlene Lento to the meeting. Marlene was a founder member of the Wells Free School campaign, who described the 'free school' process and progress to date in trying to persuade Berkeley Homes to make the existing post-graduate centre available for the provision of a free school.

Marlene had provided a briefing note for Forum members, which she presented, and answered detailed questions about the campaign and its benefits, not only to parents who supported the proposal but in the scheme's wider community provision.

A number of members expressed support for the free school proposal but others raised concerns, on issues such as the possible impact on efforts to secure new or replacement schools elsewhere in the town centre and in the fact that there would be no playing field provision as part of the free school plans.

As an example of the first such concern, Councillor Mrs Mayhew firmly stated that she did not wish to see any free school proposal which might jeopardise long-standing efforts to upgrade or replace St Peter's Primary School. Marlene Lento advised that, as free school funding was provided directly by central government, there should be no negative impact on the provision of a new St Peter's School.

Councillor Ben Chapelard said he was concerned that KCC had missed the opportunity to secure a new primary school as part of the redevelopment of this site. He added that he would like to see the County Cabinet member challenged on this point

Councillor Bulman felt that, if the Town Forum collectively felt unable to signal its support for the free school initiative (although individual members were free to do so), it should nevertheless indicate to Berkeley Homes that it would like to see some form of community provision as part of the redevelopment proposals.

Mrs Lento was thanked for her presentation, the Chairman adding that the Forum would welcome her back for further discussion, once Berkeley Homes had come to a decision as to whether they would seriously consider use of the postgraduate centre for this scheme.

The Chairman next invited Stephen Lukacs to address the meeting. Mr Lukacs was a leading advocate of developers being required to use local labour for such large scale projects, and was seeking the support of the Town Forum in respect of the hospital site.

Councillor Williams advised that, in two recent planning application approvals by TWBC, both relating to significant housing redevelopment schemes, a planning condition had been agreed, requiring 20% of the labour force to be recruited locally. Mr Lukacs felt, however, that a much higher percentage could be achieved, under existing legislation.

It was agreed the Chairman would write formally to Berkeley Homes, setting out the views of the Town Forum as follows: (a) that some form of community provision should be featured in the redevelopment proposals; and (b) that a significant amount of local labour should be used in the redevelopment of the site.

### **Action**

- DW The Chairman to write formally to Berkeley Homes, calling for some form of community provision within the K&S Hospital redevelopment proposals, and that a significant amount of local labour should be used. **NB** – This task was completed on 2 July.

## **43. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **The use of TWBC parks**

Jane Fenwick drew members' attention to an event planned for 8/9 September, which had been advertised in the latest edition of 'Local', the Borough Council's magazine, delivered to all properties in the Borough. The event, entitled 'Shack Attack', was in support of fundraising efforts to help families escape the trap of 'poverty housing' and was being organised by Habitat for Humanity. Thirty teams of four people were being invited to design and build their own shelters from 'scavenged' material, in which they would spend the night.

Jane advised that an error had occurred in the advert, which stated that this would be taking place in Calverley Park, whereas it was actually due to be held in Calverley Grounds. Added to that, she felt that this sort of event, which she feared might encourage a disruptive presence, was inappropriate for town centre gardens. Ironically, Jane advised, no-one in the Tunbridge Wells Borough was likely to benefit from either the publicity or the fundraising.

Jane reported that she had held discussions with the Cabinet Portfolio-holder, Cllr Mrs Jane March, to share her concerns. She had been told that TWBC would be monitoring social network sites leading up to the event and liaising with the Police, as necessary. In addition, she had been reassured that: (a) once all 30 'shelters' had been taken up by families, no further publicity would occur; and (b) there would be no repeat of this event in the future.

Councillors Mrs Mayhew and Bulman both agreed that, while this contractual arrangement could not be changed, this was a good opportunity for the Town Forum to begin discussions with TWBC as to how it uses its parks in the town. While the Forum cannot be too prescriptive, they added, it was only right that the Forum should be able to help shape the future policy in terms of what was right, and what was not, in respect of permissions given for events.

Councillor Bulman added that he was appalled that ward members had not been advised of this particular event.

The Chairman advised that both he and Jane Fenwick would follow this issue up with the Borough Council.

**Action**

DW The Chairman and Jane Fenwick to raise the principle with TWBC of the Forum  
JF being involved in formal discussions regarding the use of town centre parks.

The meeting concluded at 8.20pm.