



**Draft Minutes of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum meeting
held on Thursday 28th July 2011 in the Town Hall**

Representatives Present

David Wakefield (Chair), Jane Fenwick (Deputy Chair), Sally Balcon, Victor Bethell, June Bridgeman, John Cunningham, John Forster, Anne Forster, John Goodfellow, Lesley Herriot, JS Higgs, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, George Lawson, Ian Naismith, Kate Sergeant, Chris Thomas, Katharina Mahler-Bech, John Mattei, David J Moon, Peter Perry, Angela Phillips, Mary Wardrop and Philip Whitbourn.

Cllrs Ben Chapelard, Catherine Mayhew and James Scholes.

Also in attendance

Marguerita Morton

Item 1 - Apologies

Lorna Blackmore, Betsy Dix, Michael Doyle, Maggie Fraser, Michele Hull, Chris Morris, Altan Omer, Anne Stobo and Roger Walsh

Cllrs Ronen Basu, Peter Bulman, Peter Crawford, Caroline Derrick, Tracy Moore, David Neve, Trevor Poile and Len Price.

Item 2 – Proposed Ice Rink in Calverley Grounds – December 2011/January 2012

Prior to the commencement of the business listed in the Agenda for the meeting, the Town Forum received a presentation from Paul Taylor, Director for Communities and Change and Brian McAteer, Leisure and Health Manager on plans to provide an open air ice rink in Calverley Grounds for a trial period from 26 November 2011 to 3 January 2012. If the results were favourable the intention would be to consider a 4/5 year project. Based on experience elsewhere, in Winchester and Cardiff for example, the proposal was expected to attract a significant amount of public support and it was hoped that it would also be good for local business. During the Q&A session which followed a number of points were made as summarised below:

- It was proposed to associate the ice rink with a 'winter wonderland' experience although this would evolve and grow after the first trial year which would essentially test the market.
- An open, all weather facility was contemplated, with real ice and its dimensions would be about 20 metres x 20 metres.
- Opening hours were expected to be 10 am until 9 pm although in the first few weeks the facility might open a little later in the morning and close earlier in the evening during the early part of the week. The ice rink would be floodlit at night.

- Other ice rinks (for instance at Winchester) were known to be commercially viable, although each location is unique. A one year trial would test the market and there was every reason to hope that it would grow in popularity from year to year.
- There was some surprise about the dates which some thought should be put back a little. However it was explained that the intention was to open early to justify the business case and allow for the start of the new school term on 4 January.
- The park was licensed for five public events per annum and this would be one of them albeit that it would run for an extended period. It was not intended to fund any additional litter clearance and grounds maintenance costs from 'special expenses'. It was hoped to achieve a balanced budget in the first year with income off-setting costs although it was accepted that this was a risk.
- The artificial ice rink at the Pantiles had not been run for several years and so the question of two similar attractions in competition did not arise.
- The proposal would be good for the town and business but could create noise and disturbance for local residents, particularly during the evenings and at weekends. This point was acknowledged: it was clearly essential that the views of local residents were taken into account. If the proposal was to be successful it must be acceptable to local residents.
- Officers would be talking to South East Trains in September to see what additional services or special arrangements they might be prepared to consider over the extended Christmas period.

The Chair summed up briefly and thanked representatives for their questions and encouraging views.

Item 3 – Membership Changes

No changes were reported. The Secretary had written to a small number of organisations who did not currently have a named representative inviting them to appoint a representative (and deputy) if they wished to remain in membership. In addition an approach had been made to a number of residents' associations in the unparished area inviting them to join the Town Forum.

Items 4 and 5 – Minutes of the previous meeting and Matters Arising

The draft minutes of the June meeting were agreed as an accurate record, subject to corrections to:

- the second paragraph of Item 1 – Election of Town Forum Officers to add after the words 'preceding months' at the end of the first sentence 'and the hard work put in by Chris Thomas as Chairman and for his support to the work of the Transport Forum'.
- the heading to the final paragraph under Item 10 which should read 'Kent & Sussex Hospital site'.

The only matter arising was that the Chair confirmed that the action points listed in paragraphs 2. to 5. under item 6 (Response to the TWBC Core Strategy Review) had all been dealt with.

6.Oral Reports from Councillors

(a) Core Strategy Review

June Bridgeman questioned why the Planning Department tended to regard views submitted on behalf of the Town Forum as being equivalent to those submitted by an individual. Cllr Mrs Mayhew was aware of this issue and would ensure that Council officers paid due weight and regard to the Town Forum's response given the number of organisations represented by it. There was currently no further information about the Council's response to the Town Forum's views or the progress of the CSR process. Cllr Mrs Mayhew confirmed that she would maintain a watching brief.

(b) Urban Parking Study Update

John Goodfellow referred to the Urban Parking Study, prepared for the Council by Adrian Neve of Peter Brett Associates which had been reported to the meeting of the Council's Environment & Governance Select Committee held on 5 July 2011, and which put forward three scenarios for consideration: do nothing; do minimum; and do something.

Cllr Scholes cautioned against any premature discussion of this matter as at this stage the Council had no strategy, merely a study which they had commissioned from consultants. Robert Hardy read out to the meeting an extract from the draft minutes of the Select Committee's meeting as follows:

'Councillor Ransley informed the Committee that he saw the document supplied by Peter Brett Associates as an excellent compendium of the current car park provision and suggestions for their future use. He suggested to the Committee that it was not a 'strategy', as a 'strategy' would be directed by agreed policy, which Councillor Ransley pointed out was a matter to be decided by elected Members. He suggested that an overall policy should be to provide adequate parking within the urban area for all who wished to visit and suggested the Committee could assist in putting forward more detailed policy. Referring to the options in the Committee report, Councillor Ransley suggested that the 'do nothing' option should not be followed, but reminded the Committee that other courses of action would cost various amounts of money. He suggested that at least some of the suggested actions in the report should be enacted to improve the appeal of certain car parks.'

It was agreed that Cllr Ransley should be invited to report back on this matter at the Town Forum's October meeting. The Management Committee agreed to keep an eye on the parking issue.

In the meantime, Philip Whitbourn was asked to re-circulate copies of his parking map or put a digital copy on the Town Forum's website.

(c) Outcome of full Council debate on the M&N Report

Cllr Chapelard reported that he had asked a question at the Council meeting to establish when the Council intended to make public the full shareholders agreement between TWBC and Laings and had been informed that the document could not be published in its entirety for reasons of commercial sensitivity. Moreover, his attempt to move an amendment to the Leader's motion to secure the publication of the full, unredacted document had been ruled out of order. In reply to the same question which he had asked at the meeting of the Cabinet earlier in the day, Councillor Chapelard had been informed that it was now hoped to publish the edited version of the shareholders agreement on the Council website on 12 August 2011. Councillor Chapelard accepted that this was a step forward but still fell short of the full openness and transparency that he was looking for.

It was reported that the Cabinet had also agreed that further work by the Tunbridge Wells Regeneration Company on the Great Hall Car Park should be suspended indefinitely.

Cllr Mrs Mayhew believed that the M&N report had revealed some useful information about the views of local people on leisure and parks. There was support for a public open space in the centre of town, and many people would like to see improvements in the museum and art gallery and cultural and leisure facilities.

Philip Whitbourn agreed that improvements to the museum had been outstanding for a long time.

John Cunningham expressed a number of concerns about the integrity of the M&N report: in his view the methodology was unsound not least as leading questions had been asked.

The Chair summed up the discussion under this heading by confirming, as previously agreed, that Cllr David Jukes would be invited to the September meeting of the Town Forum to give an update on the Civic Site, the master plan and other town centre matters within his portfolio. It was intended that Cllr Ransley would be invited to the October meeting to give an update on the parking study and other issues within his portfolio.

7. Report from Town Forum Management Committee

(a) Changes to Standard Agenda Topics

Three amendments were agreed to the 'standard items' on the agenda as follows:

'Reports from Councillors' are set out in two parts. Firstly, there should be those that take the form of reporting back on matters from previous meetings that a specific Councillor had agreed to take forward. Secondly, that (starting from the September meeting) the councillors for a specific Ward would jointly provide an update on local matters in their Ward.

'Reports from Champions/Vision Committee' should be dropped as a standing item and replaced with a regular report from the Management Committee and regular reports from Town Forum Working Parties (more on this below).

(b) Priority Topics for the Year

The Management Committee had looked at the items suggested in the 'Forward Plan' appended to the minutes of the May meeting and proposed:

That the Town Forum agrees to no more than 4 priority topics for it to consider over the next year. That some of the items on the 'Forward Plan' needed to be looked at in greater detail by the Management Committee to help it decide whether the topic should be considered a priority to be added to the Town Forum agenda. Finally that room needed to be kept aside on each agenda for topics of a pressing nature – for example KCC consultations on the future of the youth service and (later this year) the future of the library service.

The four items suggested were as follows and the Chair hoped that they would give the Town Forum a clear future role –

- Supporting short-term action on the Cinema Site
- Direct involvement with the Town Centre master-plan/TCAAP processes (which would include the Civic Complex)
- A focus on what more could be done to boost (overnight) tourism

- Improvements needed/opportunities to be taken in relation to parking, improving ‘the street-scene’ and further pedestrianisation

The four items were welcomed and supported by members of the Town Forum who made a number of comments as follows:

- A town centre plan covering all four items was key;
- Access into the town was important too and that was tied into the parking strategy;
- Traffic was a key issue for the Town Forum. It was suggested that the 4th topic should be broadened to include traffic management;
- The Town Forum must speak on these matters with a concerted voice.

(c) Working Parties

The Chair stressed that for each of the four items the Management Committee would like to hear the views of Town Forum members on the formation of a working party to undertake more detailed work and to bring suggestions and recommendations to the Town Forum. The excellent work done by the Planning/Housing Working Party was felt to be a model for how this could work.

Members of the Town Forum congratulated the Management Team on choosing these four topics and looked forward to the formation of a small working party to dust off the earlier work done by the Town Forum relating to the Town Centre as a possible contribution to decisions on the next steps.

In the meantime the Management Committee would undertake further work in relation to –

- Special Expenses – to understand what opportunity the Town Forum may have to influence this budget and
- the Localism Bill (especially the impact on Planning and the potential future role of the Town Forum)

By way of clarification Robert Hardy reported that public consultation on the LDF and Town Centre Area Action Plans would begin on 13 October and end on 11 December and suggested that the Town Forum might wish to set up a small group to prepare a submission in advance rather than wait for the start of the consultation process.

Robert Hardy advised on the community empowerment provisions of the Localism Bill which would give local communities:

‘The Right to Buy’ local assets such as libraries, pubs and shops. If an asset of community value was threatened with closure communities would have the right to bid and raise capital to buy the asset when it comes onto the open market.

‘The Right to Challenge’ to take over services. Voluntary and community bodies and parish councils would be able to run a local authority service where they thought they could do it better.

Proposals in the Bill for neighbourhood planning would allow local neighbourhoods to develop their own plans which if they met the statutory requirements would have to be adopted by the local authority.

The Management Committee had also asked Robert Hardy to prepare a ‘briefing pack’ for all Town Forum representatives, which would include a map of the unparished area and key statistics relating to local residents and businesses. This was already in hand.

Item 10 – Any Other Business

(a) Robert Hardy

On behalf of all members present the Chair thanked Robert Hardy for his sterling support as Town Forum Secretary and wished him well for the future.

(b) The Pantiles

Congratulations were expressed to the Pantiles Traders' Association for giving this part of the town a new lease of life.

(c) Kent & Sussex Hospital Site

It was reported that Kent CC were looking for a section 106 order from the developer to fund the provision of additional school places. This would not however amount to the provision of a new primary school.

(d) Tourist Information Centre

At their meeting earlier in the year the Cabinet had agreed to keep the Tourist Information Centre open Tuesday to Sunday (closed on Mondays) at the end of the summer season 2011 and at the Old Fish market 7-days per week for the summer season 2012.

The meeting closed at 8:15pm