



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum meeting held on Thursday 29 September 2011 in the Town Hall

Representatives Present

David Wakefield (Chair), Jane Fenwick (Deputy Chair), Sally Balcon, June Bridgeman, John Cunningham, Betsy Dix, Michael Doyle, Judith Farnie, Maggie Fraser, Lesley Herriot, Dorothy Holman, Michael Holman, Michelle Hull, George Lawson, Kate Sergeant, Katharina Mahler-Bech, John Mattei, Jeanne Michau, Chris Morris, David J Morris, Marguerita Morris, Altan Omer, Jenina Pendry, Angela Phillips, Anne Stobo, David Wakefield, Mary Wardrop, Philip Whitbourn and Frank Williams.

Cllrs Ronen Basu, Peter Bulman and James Scholes.

Also in attendance

Victor Webb

Item 1 - Apologies

Lorna Blakemore, John Forster, Kyrios Kyriacou, Stephen Marshall, Peter Perry and Christopher Thomas.

Cllrs Ben Chapelard, David Jukes, Tracy Moore, David Neve, Trevor Poile and Nicholas Rogers.

Item 2 – Membership Changes

The Town Forum noted the update on membership applications, changes to representatives and notice of substitute members.

Item 3 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 July 2011

The Town Forum agreed the minutes as a correct record.

Item 4 – Report from the Town Management Forum Management Committee

a) Special Expenses

The chair updated the Forum on special expenses. He advised that the chair and vice chair had met the Head of Finance and Governance, Lee Colyer, and been updated on the issue. The Chair noted that special expenses had been introduced to ensure that different areas paid according to the cost of services that were provided for the benefit of a particular area and to ensure that 'double taxation' did not occur. The chair confirmed that special expenses were by their nature complex and not easily understood.

The chair advised the Forum that it should take an active role in becoming more involved in decisions affecting the services that form special expenses and summarised the list of services currently classed as special expenses. The Town Forum also discussed the impact of the new parish council at Rusthall and the chair confirmed that its impact would continue to be reviewed.

The chair proposed that a working group should be established to respond to the Council's budget setting process and to respond on this issue.

Action: It was agreed that a working group would be established. The working group membership would include the chair and Michael Doyle.

Item 5 - Oral Reports from Councillors

(a) Property Issues generally and the Cinema Site in Particular

The Forum was advised that Councillor Jukes (Portfolio Holder for Property and Major Projects) was unable to attend the meeting as a result of illness. The Forum agreed to discuss the matter in his absence.

It was noted that the cinema site had been purchased by a private equity firm as part of a joint venture. It was also noted that a series of meetings had been held between the Council and the firm to progress the site. The Forum agreed that sensitive and appropriate development of the site was important and urgent to the town centre and residents. Councillor Scholes advised the forum that the Council would continue to work with the new owners of the site. He also suggested that the Forum should maintain its monitoring of the site and allow further discussions to take place.

The forum noted that Councillor Attwood had agreed to attend its next meeting in October to discuss his approach to the Town Centre masterplan. The forum would have the opportunity to discuss property issues at this meeting and explore what actions the leader had taken following the 'pause' on regeneration issues that he introduced at the start of his term as leader.

(b) Other Updates from Councillors

Councillor Basu updated the Forum on the Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom campaign. The Forum and the Council had revived the competition in 2010. Councillor Basu advised that the Town had received a silver award in the large town category. Councillor Basu also advised that Dunorlan Park had achieved a gold award in the best large park awards category. The chair delivered a vote of thanks to all those who had worked on the Bloom project.

Councillor Bulman updated the forum on the future of the Morrisons' site. It was confirmed that a planning application had been received and that Morrisons intended to open one of their 'stores of the future' at the site.

He also advised that the Trinity Theatre 'cinema' had been upgraded and would now be screening digital films.

Item 6 – Draft National Planning Policy Framework

It was advised that the chair and two members of the Forum had met with Greg Clarke MP to discuss the Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and, Philip Whitbourn had prepared a discussion paper on the NPPF for the Forum to consider.

The Forum noted and discussed the following issues:

- The consultation period on the NPPF concluded on 17 October 2011 requiring quick action by the Forum to make a considered response.
- The most contentious issues within the NPPF were the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ and that it envisaged planning applications being ‘approved wherever it is practical to do so’. It was considered that this could lead to unpopular local planning schemes being allowed against local objections.
- The definition of ‘sustainable development’ within the NPPF was vague and could lead to a presumption in favour of development of any kind anywhere.
- The need for local and neighbourhood plans to be ‘up-to-date’ could be used by developers as a reason in favour of development.
- The previous priority to develop brown field sites first and the protection of back gardens against development needed to be clarified.
- The online survey response mechanism to the consultation was discussed in detail and the questions from the survey considered. The Forum agreed that the process offered a limited form of consultation and therefore it would be better to send a formal written response. The Forum also discussed the possibility of producing a press release/statement on behalf of the Forum. It was also agreed that the chair should approach Greg Clarke MP to seek a meeting with the Town Forum to discuss its concerns.

Action: It was agreed that the Chair and Philip Whitbourn would prepare a written response to the consultation process and that Greg Clarke MP would be invited to an extraordinary meeting to discuss the NPPF and the Forum’s concerns with the draft NPPF.

Item 7 – Any Other Business

(a) Year of Celebrations 2012

Michael Holman raised the issue of the 2012 celebrations and the response and role of the Town forum to the celebrations. The chair confirmed that he and the vice chair had discussed the issue with Councillor Mayhew and he outlined some of the activities planned. Mr Holman detailed a recent trip to the twin town of Wiesbaden and he suggested the Town Forum should take the lead in exploring the building of a fountain in the town noting that this revived earlier plans on the same lines which had not been fulfilled. The Forum also considered whether it would be appropriate to plant a tree to mark the occasion of the Queen’s Jubilee and to continue a tradition in the Town. The Forum discussed its general approach further and agreed that it should form a working group to look at this matter further.

Action: It was agreed that a working group should be formed to discuss the matter.

(b) Peter Edwards

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

The meeting closed at 8:30pm