



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Draft Minutes of Meeting Tuesday 29 November 2005

Present: Len Bachelor (Hawkenbury Village Association), Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Graham Bradley (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Matt Goodwin (Tunbridge Wells Village Residents' Association), J Higgs (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), Michael Larsen (The Grove Residents' Association), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Dan Long (Hawkenbury Village Association), I Naismith (Rock Villa & Hanover Residents' Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Christine Phillip (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association (TWTF)), John Ribbins (Chancellor House Freehold Limited), Fred Sirman (Warwick Park Residents' Association), Robert Soden (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Ariana Sutton (on behalf of Rusthall Village Association), Jeremy Syers (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association), Cllr Mrs Cobbold, Cllr Crawford, Cllr Mrs Mayhew, Cllr Scholes, Cllr Wakefield

In attendance: Ellie Broughton (TWBC), Sarah Olney (TWBC), Gary Stevenson (TWBC), Cllr Bullock

1. **Apologies:** John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Michael Hicks, Patrick Shovelton, Patricia Smith, Peter Smith, Christopher Thomas, Mary Wardrop, Cllr Bulman, Cllr Wratten
2. **Press:** The Chairman welcomed Mary Harris (Chief Reporter) and Katherine Coulstock (photographer) from the Courier Newspapers.
3. **The minutes of the meeting of 26 October 2005** were approved as a correct record subject to noting that Bruce Goodwin should have been listed as present.
4. **Matters arising from the minutes of the meeting of 26 October 2005**
 - **RTW Town Forum Website** - Daniel Bech reported that he would still welcome details from individual Residents' Associations – Terms of Reference, Minutes, Dates of meetings etc, for the Town Forum's website.
 - Residents' Associations (RAs) – Mr Higgs raised a query about ensuring RAs are truly representative and it was agreed that the matter be given proper consideration in the future, and that thought be given to developing an information resource, for example with model terms of reference for RA representatives on the website.
 - **Morrisons / Safeway Store** – Gary Stevenson confirmed that Chris Briggs, the Head of Highways and Transportation Services at TWBC, had clarified ownership of lifts and confirmed maintenance arrangements (full answer available on the website).
 - **Post Office** – David Webster reinforced the urgency to having another post office.
 - **Licensing Committee** – Commander Lawson presented the sub-committee's draft Terms of Reference for comment (see later on the agenda). Sub-committee meeting notes are available on the website.
 - **Community Plan** – Councillor Wakefield, Jeremy Syers, John Goodfellow and Daniel Bech reported back from the event at the Spa Hotel held to encourage partnership approaches to reviewing and implementation of the Community Plan. All felt the event had been useful in ensuring the Town Forum's priorities (including Licensing, 'grot spots', transport and housing issues) were given consideration and were hopeful that their contributions would help deliver an improved Community Plan. Further, potential partnerships were explored. For example, it became clear that the Town Forum has shared interests with the Kent High Weald Project, with Parish Councils and with the Health Forum, amongst others, where working together might bring long-term benefits.

ACTION POINTS:

- Ellie Broughton to confirm timetable for Community Plan review.
- Future consideration be given to Residents' Associations and how they achieve representativeness.
- Future consideration be given to developing on-line advice and resources for Residents' Associations.

- **TWBC announcement on proposed new housing numbers** – the Chairman stated his concern that TWBC had announced its support for 5,000 new homes despite the Town Forum's submission to SEERA for a limit of 4,000. It made him question the influence of the Town Forum in TWBC matters and he sought a response from TWBC as to why the Town Forum's views hadn't been taken into account.

Cllrs Bullock, Mrs Mayhew and Scholes had all been at Cabinet when the decision was made to recommend the 5,000 figure to Full Council, subsequently endorsed. Cllr Bullock said that the Town Forum's submission – which he had worked with the Town Forum's sub-committee on – had been taken into account. On all other substantive points, he said, the Cabinet had agreed with the Town Forum. He personally voted for the 5,000 figure to protect retail (a key point for him was the evidence that the borough has lost footfall to Maidstone) and because of the need for homes for young people. He said that 4,000 does not meet the needs of the Tunbridge Wells population, 5,000 barely does.

Cllr Mrs Mayhew was one of two Cabinet members who had voted against the 5,000 figure. She had done so exactly because she had listened to the Town Forum's arguments for 4,000 and wished to support them. But she wanted to reassure Forum members that all the Cabinet members had considered the Town Forum's submission, and, as Cllr Bullock had indicated, their views had been taken into account on other issues.

Cllr Scholes then talked through his reasons for supporting the 5,000 figure: he was persuaded that that number of homes was needed just to sustain the population. He believed that if the borough becomes less competitive it will be the poorer for it. He also argued that whatever the figure, house building is market driven – if there is not a market for the homes they will not be built.

John Goodfellow, a member of the sub-committee which drafted the submission said that to commit to homes before infrastructure and transport gaps have been addressed was to 'put the cart before the horse'.

Dr Larsen concurred with Cllr Scholes' analysis that market forces prevail.

Matt Goodwin was grateful for the feedback from Cabinet members but reiterated that it sent a poor message to the Town Forum that, on the first substantive issue, their wishes had been overridden. He stressed the importance of progressing 'sustainability' issues such as making home energy efficient.

Jeremy Syers reminded members of the constitutional scope of the Town Forum as a consultative body, with Councillors responsible for decision-making.

Commander Lawson said that reducing the issue to a 'numbers game' was oversimplification. He said the Town needs homes for young people but asked 'who can afford them? They're too expensive, the infrastructure is inadequate and the wrong sort of new homes are being built'. He felt the press coverage, around numbers, was shallow and wanted to see better joining up between the issues and processes.

Cllr Bullock said that from the very first meeting he had encouraged the Town Forum to set its sights on influencing strategy: high level, major strategy formulation. He wanted to ensure that the Town Forum is 'embedded' into the strategy development processes – but it means hard work for Forum members: it would be a tremendous reading exercise to keep abreast of the relevant material. He said that members must be prepared to do homework and serious research to argue their points. The opportunity to influence should not be treated lightly.

Cllr Higgs cautioned against being part of a 'box ticking exercise'. It was not for Forum members to become specialists, he said – expertise should be provided by the Council.

Cllr Scholes explained his role on the Infrastructure Committee which considers long-term infrastructure issues such as future water provision and number of Doctors surgeries.

Finally the Chairman said he wants the Town Forum to identify a co-ordinated way of responding to documents and consultative opportunities in the future.

5. Welcome to New Members

The Chairman welcomed Christine Philip, representing new member the Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association.

He also welcomed the Grove Hill Road Residents' Association, Bruce Goodwin.

6. Proposals for Alcohol Control Designation in RTW Town Centre

Councillor Bullock presented the proposals for alcohol control designated streets in RTW Town Centre subject to the outcome of a 12-week public consultation period. He circulated a map illustrating the proposed streets affected and explained that one of the requirements of the scheme is that there must be existing evidence of anti-social behaviour on a street for it to be included.

Forum members raised queries which Councillor Bullock answered as best he could but he encouraged questioners to write in formally so that proper consideration might be given.

Jane Fenwick was interested in how the streets would be designated – whilst supportive of the proposal she nonetheless would not wish to see a proliferation of signage. She also queried how privately-owned areas, such as Calverley Grounds would be affected: would there be a danger of anti-social behaviour being 'pushed' into private areas? Again Cllr Bullock speculated on possible solutions but asked for a formal submission to officers so that they could check the legal position.

Fred Sirman raised an ongoing problem of anti-social behaviour at the Neville Cricket Ground of which the police and the Council had been made aware. There were serious health and safety concerns, he said, with people clambering on the pavilion roof. He wished to see TWBC re-instate signage which prohibits unauthorised use of the grounds. Cllr Bullock asked for written details to be submitted under the consultation arrangements and advised that Councillor Scholes could raise the issue with the Community Safety Partnership.

Dr Larsen suggested six roads that ought to be included: Chapel Place, Mount Sion (both major pedestrian thoroughfares), Station Approach, Warwick Park (below Roedean), Mount Ephraim (from intersection just below hospital), and the area around Crescent Road car park.

The Chairman concluded that Forum members were supportive of the proposals, in principle, and asked for the proposals to be posted onto the website seeking comments. He reminded the group that members without internet access might access the website at the Library. Mary Harris also said she would endeavour to provide more coverage through the Courier.

ACTIONS:

- Forum members to submit comments to Linda Mortley, TWBC, during the consultation period (All).
- Cllr Scholes to raise the specific problems of Neville Cricket Ground with the CSP.
- Daniel Bech to post proposals on the website encouraging comments.
- Courier be asked to provide more publicity on the proposals and the consultation arrangements (Mary Harris).

7. Feedback from 'Eyesore Premises and Buildings in RTW' sub-committee

The sub-committee's draft terms of reference were agreed subject to ensuring the Town Forum leaves itself flexibility to approach property owners with their concerns.

Daniel Bech presented the conclusions of the sub-committee on the 'top ten grot spots' in RTW, which are viewable on the website:

1. Ritz building (cinema site)
2. Eridge Road – land behind petrol station
3. Tunbridge Wells Central Station
4. Monson Road colonnades and balustrades
5. Greyhound pub – Grosvenor Bridge
6. 30 Warwick Park
7. Summerhill House, 73 Inner London Road
8. 32 Mount Ephraim
9. Albert Street (opposite RVP car park)
10. RTW – Wiesbaden Twin Town road signs

Plus:

- Premises in Quarry Road (next to Barnabas School)
- Medway Depot / TWBC printing department

The Town Forum applauded Daniel for the presentation and thanked the sub-committee for their work.

The Chairman asked that it be recognised and re-enforced that the Town Forum was working in the spirit of partnership with the Council: Gary Stevenson, whose efforts should be supported, had asked the Town Forum's help in prioritising improvement sites and the Courier should be encouraged to recognise the Council's work behind the initiative.

Councillor Bullock talked about the powers the Council has to issue repair orders but gave past examples which illustrated that the timescale involved can often be several years. A Capel property which had an order served on it burnt down twice before being restored. The Council had had to compulsorily purchase in that case. The Medway Road Depot, he said, had been earmarked for redevelopment as a housing site but the timing hinges on the acquisition of land for an alternative depot.

Gary Stevenson referred to his earlier presentation and said that he hoped members had been reassured that he and the Council are genuine in their efforts to take action.

He reported on the Greyhound pub which was in the process of being cleaned up and cars moved from the front. Unfortunately, he said, the Council's powers did not extend to changing the colour of the building itself.

Gary thanked the Town Forum's sub-committee for its 'top ten' list which he said he would review in terms of what action might be taken and he would report back. He was seeking guidance as to the extent to which Council actions against property owners can be made public.

Jeremy Syers thanked Daniel Bech for his work in bringing a higher profile to the problems in the town.

ACTIONS:

- Terms of reference to be adopted subject to flexibility about approaching property owners (Commander Lawson / Daniel Bech).
- Gary Stevenson to review top ten list and report back accordingly.
- Gary also to clarify whether the Council can publicise action it is taking against property owners.
- Courier be asked to include a perspective on how much the Council is doing to clean up the town (Mary Harris).
- All future agendas to have a standing item on 'grot spot progress' (Ellie Broughton).

8. Feedback from Licensing Sub-Committee

Commander Lawson, in the absence of Christopher Thomas and Michael Hicks, gave feedback from the Licensing Sub-Committee meeting of 22 November. He first referred to the Terms of Reference and objectives circulated at the start of the meeting and previously presented by Christopher Thomas at the October meeting and these were approved for adoption.

At its meeting of 22 November the sub-committee concluded that:

- (1) 'We need formal agreement from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to provide assistance in achieving our objectives as set out in the paper submitted at our last meeting and which is now before you, and which has been formally adopted by the Sub-Licensing Committee of the Town Forum.
- (2) 'We ask the Council to authorise this Committee to set up appropriate channels of communication with the Council Licensing Officer, the Police and the relevant personnel in the appropriate National Health Service Trust for this area. This request is put forward to enable us to gain a greater insight into how Licensing decisions are made, the criteria used in making those decisions, and to enable us to access how best to liaise and cooperate with the Council, the Police, and the NHS to ensure a mutually happy understanding between all parties.
- (3) 'To agree to place an informative two-page spread in the Courier Newspaper with user-friendly information on how the Licensing Act works and how to make a complaint. Another possible way of disseminating the ways in which the Act works could be inclusion of an explanatory insert in next years' Council Tax mailing.
- (4) 'The Sub-Licensing Committee wishes to receive a response to each request/requirement put forward in our working paper together with information upon how a Complaints Register will be set up, run and monitored by officers of the Council.
- (5) 'In summary, the message we gave at our last meeting remains the same. We ask the Borough Council to give comment and agreement upon each part of the working paper now before you.'

Gary Stevenson thanked Commander Lawson and the sub-committee for its submission. He said that the Council's own Licensing Committee was due to meet later that week and he would draw the Chairman's attention to their requests and report back formally at the next meeting.

He also gave details about how residents could report incidents of nuisance etc.

Jane Fenwick queried the extent of liaison between the police and the Council about action being taken and Gary explained that the Police do log complaints and action and that their licensing officers do liaise with the Council.

Details of licensing hours for each premises will be available on the Council's website in due course but in the meantime residents can call the Council offices (01892 526121) to ask for details.

9. Short Announcements

- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council are due to consider and announce budget framework proposals for the following financial year shortly. Ellie Broughton said she will advise Forum members once these are made public along with details of any associated consultation.

10. Items for Future Meetings

- Local Development Framework.
- Broadening membership of the Town Forum.
- Residents' Associations – ensuring RAs are representative of residents, and possible development of information and advice for RA representatives.
- Community Plan – next steps.

11. Any Other Business

The Chairman sought a volunteer to coordinate details on consultative documents and initiatives.

12. Date of Next Meeting - Tuesday 20 December, Town Hall, 7pm for 7.30pm.