

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 29 November 2007

1. Present:

Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), June Bridgeman (Soroptimist International), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Anthony Forte (Upper Stone Street Residents' Association), John Higgs (Hanover Road and Rock Villa Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Bruce Goodwin (Grove Hill Road Association), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove), George Lawson, (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Ian Naismith (Hanover and Rock Villa Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Land Association), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Users' Association), Christopher Thomas (The Chairman of the Town Forum and The Goodwins Nos 1 & 2 Residents' Company), David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association), Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association) and Tricia Wright (Calverley Park Association).

Councillors Peter Crawford (Broadwater), Mrs Catherine Mayhew (Park), John Miller (Culverden), Leonard Price (Culverden), James Scholes (Pantiles and St Mark's), David Wakefield (Culverden).

2. Apologies:

Jenny Alexander (Rusthall Village Association), Jenny Blackburn (Rusthall Village Association), Betsey Dix (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Matt Goodwin (Village Residents' Association), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association).

Councillors: Roy Bullock (Leader of the Council), Barry Edwards (Rusthall), Mrs Leslie Herriot (St John's), Frank Williams (Sherwood).

(Christopher Thomas in the Chair for the duration of the meeting)

3. Membership Changes

Anthony Forte is a new member of the Town Forum and is the new Chairman of the Upper Stone Street Residents' Association.

Patrick Shovelton has resigned from his position of Chairman to the Inner London Road Residents' Association and also from the Town Forum, due to moving out of the area; no one has replaced him at present.

Poona Road has formed an association, Poona Road Residents' Association; no members of the association have been appointed to represent the association. The Committee Administrator will keep the Town Forum informed of any new members.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 25 October 2007

The minutes were agreed, subject to the following amendments:

Amendment to minute '1.0 present', 8th line:

'Michael Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), should in fact read George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association).'

Addition to minute '10.0 Any Other Business, Website Hits':

'There was a brilliant opportunity for individuals to ask and comment about what irritates them on <http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/asktheleader>'

5. Matters Arising/Actions Completed from the Meeting dated 25 October 2007

Actions:

- 5.1 Matt Goodwin to contact Janet Naim regarding the job description for the Press Officer.
- 5.2 Councillor Bullock to report back to the Town Forum on any progress being made on land ownership at the Station/Morrisons.
- 5.3 Matt Goodwin to circulate the dates of his meetings with the Directors to the Forum as soon as possible.
- 9.2 That the Town Forum submit a 'discussion paper' to Robert Cottrill giving possible future uses for the Town Hall.
- 9.3 That Christopher Thomas write to the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio for Planning and Development regarding the Forum's views on the Cinema Site.

It was agreed that Christopher Thomas would chase the actions 5.1 to 5.3. He would also complete actions 9.2 and 9.3 by January's meeting.

Actions Completed:

- 8.1 That Lois Howell circulate guidance notes on powers and functions of parish councils and general information relating to the Bill. (Previously circulated with 25 October minutes)
- 9.1 Philip Whitbourn to find out who owned the remaining 75% of the Royal Victoria Place.

6. Reports from Borough Councillors

Councillor Mrs Mayhew – informed the Town Forum that the Council's bid for the Commons was unsuccessful but the Council had not given up.

Ward Walks - At the Council's Cabinet meeting dated 15 November 2007, a report was submitted relating to 'Ward Walks'. It sets out the outcomes of the Ward Walk pilot, which sought to test out a new approach to community engagement, involving frontline councillors and officers from a range of services across the Council.

Following the success of the pilot, the Cabinet agreed to mainstream the approach across the borough and would seek partner involvement in the programme.

Urban Parishing – The Corporate Services Select Committee met on 27 November and discussed Urban Parishing. They had agreed that they would investigate this matter further.

Core Strategy – On 15 November 2007, the Council's Cabinet approved the issue of Core Strategy: Preferred Options Report for statutory public consultation. Members of the Town Forum were encouraged to read the Council's Core Strategy: Preferred Options; this document was available from the Council's website. This report provides:

Cinema Site – The query of how long the planning permission had left before expiry on the permission given – it was thought that planning permission to demolish the site without needing to rebuild was approved roughly two years ago. It was agreed that Daniel Bech would supply a copy of this approval to Christopher Thomas.

Councillor Price – asked the Town Forum that should they have any issues that should be raised with the Council's Audit Committee to email them direct to him len.price@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Actions

- 6.1 That members of the Town Forum read the Core Strategy: Preferred Options Report available from the Council's website.
- 6.2 That Daniel Bech provides a copy of the planning permission of the Cinema Site approved a couple of years ago.
- 6.3 Should members of the Forum have any items that they want considered at the Council's next Audit Committee, to email Councillor Price direct on the email address above.

7. Reports from Committees

Planning Committee – Philip Whitbourn briefed members of the Town Forum on various issues, namely:

Local Development Framework – The Core Strategy was considered at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Cabinet on 15 November and they agreed that from 30 November 2007, a six-week public consultation period would take place, closing 11 January 2008. Philip suggested that a working party be set up to go through the Core Strategy and to make suggestions. Once the working party have met, their comments would be approved by the Town Forum to be submitted to the Council by the deadline of 11 January. The Town Forum agreed this; Philip would be the Chairman of the working party and would liaise with other members of the Town Forum as to who would sit on the working party, but it was suggested that Councillor Miller, Jenny Blackburn, June Bridgeman, Michael Larsen and Daniel Bech be appointed as well as himself as Chairperson.

The Town Forum also noted that a Public Exhibition would take place on Saturday 8 December at the Camden Centre, Tunbridge Wells from 10am until 5pm and a Stakeholder Exhibition would be held on 10 December in Committee Room C in the Town Hall from 10am until 8pm.

Local Listing Project – Arrangements had been made for the Local List of Heritage Assets. The document was submitted to the Borough Council on 15 November together with a copy to the Reference Library. The document could be important in relation to the MasterPlan.

Ownership of Royal Victoria Place – In the case of Royal Victoria Place, Hermes Pension Fund is a joint venture partner having a 50% stake, the remaining 25% being with investment banks.

Community Plan Partnership – The Partnership was due to meet on 14 November; this was cancelled and an away day was arranged for partners and stakeholders on 30 November at the Salomons Centre, Southborough and that Daniel Bech would be in attendance.

Secretary of the Committee – The Town Forum was informed that Daniel Bech was stepping down as Secretary to the Planning Committee. The Town Forum thanked Daniel for his dedication to the Committee and for his huge contribution.

Development Partner Event – The Town Forum was informed that Philip and June Bridgeman had attended a Development Partner event that was held on 28 November 2007. The event took the form of an exhibition running from 2pm until 7pm with displays by the three short-listed potential partners, John Laing, ING and St Modwen.

Philip went on to explain that the Council's invitation to tender, provided to potential Development Partners was in May 2007, and had described Tunbridge Wells as uniquely positioned in Kent and benefiting from a rich historical legacy. The Council had expressed a desire to build upon Tunbridge Wells' strong brand, bringing vitality to the heart of the community and confirming Tunbridge Wells as a regional destination.

The Council expressed opinions on seeking a Development Partner to assist with the regeneration of key centres within the Borough, with relevant experience, including MasterPlanning skills. The aim was for the partner to help formulate a vision for Tunbridge Wells town centre from which regeneration would be delivered and development opportunities unlocked.

Philip then went on to explain and give details of each of the potential Development Partners' exhibitions. The three displays varied in the extent to which ideas about the town had been developed. Philip concluded by saying that a recommendation from Cabinet in December/January would be submitted to full Council in February 2008.

It was also suggested that should any Town Forum member have a question, they should go through the Council's website and 'Ask the Leader'.

June Bridgeman said that the plus factor was the proposals for the town centre would at last create the long-needed strategic debate on the sort of place Royal Tunbridge Wells should strive to be. What was crucial however, was how matters were now carried forward so that local people had full and proper say before any commitments and the town's control of its assets was not simply signed away to developers.

Unsurprisingly, all three bidders focused on the plum central asset of the Town Hall site they were being offered, their brief having signalled the Council were content to hand it over. The implications of this had never been debated with the public nor was it clear who would pay for relocation. It would be astonishing if such a major decision - which was crucial to the developers interest - were to be slipped through by the 'back door'. None of the bidders - possibly because this had not been drawn to their attention - appeared to have considered the significance of the Longfield Road estate which was a much more natural "partner" than the other areas in the bundle on offer. Moreover, it seemed questionable under local authority competition rules to have tied redevelopment of four such different places to a single bidder and Royal Tunbridge Wells' people would find it hard to see why their assets should fund Paddock Wood and Cranbrook.

Of the 3 proposals,

St Modwen had given no indication of their ideas, other than that they would be "heritage led" and worked out through consultation, so it was impossible to assess their implications.

ING proposed a glitzy retail centre having flattened the heart of the town, saying "the heritage bit can follow later".

John Laing were clearly the keenest to get the deal and proposed to lead on art, heritage and culture, with retail development reinforcing that theme. They had looked at transport and "down the hill" as well as the Town Hall site. They also offered some optional approaches for the form of redevelopment of the Town Hall and the block of land beyond it. However, these proposals too would drastically change the town landscape, and assumed relocation of the Council.

The Town Forum thanked June and Philip for their views and comments regarding the exhibition.

Corporate Services Select Committee – Daniel Bech, John Goodfellow, Michael Doyle, Katharina Mahler-Bech and Philip Whitbourn had attended the Council's Corporate Services Select Committee on 27 November in the Art Gallery of the Tunbridge Wells Museum. The reason for the attendance was primarily Urban Parishing, which featured the Town Forum's discussion paper of January 2007, together with an extract from the Town Forum minutes dated 25 October.

Philip stated that the 'Discussion paper' had been produced following the publication of the Government's White Paper in January 2007. Philip went on to express his views of the discussion of the Urban Parishing and concluded that the Town Forum meeting due to be held on 7 February 2008 would be a workshop for Urban Parishing led by the Council's Scrutiny Team; (this was also agreed at the last meeting of the Town Forum on 25 October 2007).

Vision Committee – Michael Larsen informed the Town Forum that the Committee last met on 20 November; he then briefed the Town Forum on various issues, namely:

An International Strategy for Kent – Kent County Councillor Alex King gave an International Strategy for Kent talk on 6 November, held at St John's Church Centre, Tunbridge Wells; this was very well attended. Michael informed the Town Forum that County Councillor King, (who was and still is a member of the Tunbridge Wells Joint Transportation Board), had mislaid his copy of the Town Forum's 'Vision Strategy for Kent' document and so Michael had circulated him a spare together with some additional information. Michael asked the Town Forum that should any member wish to receive a copy they should contact him direct.

Disabled Access – Michael informed the Town Forum that the Committee were in the interim stages of negotiations with bus companies to have disabled access bus services to run at specific times and routes; this would allow disabled people the opportunity of knowing that a disabled access bus was available.

Renewable Energy – A recommendation would soon be submitted to the Council to ask whether or not the Council could enforce compliance when a new or an old building was being built/renovated that renewable energy provisions should be incorporated. Michael would update the Town Forum on the progress/response in due course.

Safeway Site – Michael had spoken with the Lidl chain and he advised them that the site was still available to let; he did stress that he approached Lidl. Michael would be having discussions with Lidl's senior management within the next couple of days and that he would keep the Town Forum up to date on any progress made. Councillor Mrs Mayhew made comment that if Morrisons wanted to keep the site empty then there was little that could be done, as they were paying for the lease in accordance with their requirements.

Transport Committee – John Goodfellow updated the Town Forum on various issues.

John had attended an exploratory meeting on 22 November, open to any of those concerned in Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Councillor Barrington-King (Portfolio holder for Environment and Street Scene) chaired the meeting; also in attendance were Councillor Williams (Lead Member Economy & Transport, in support of Cabinet Members) and Richard Powell (Director of Services to the Community).

The Town Forum noted that John had drawn attention to the disjointed position of 'transport' in Tunbridge Wells and the difficulties of making any impact on the Joint Transportation Board (JTB). He had suggested to the Chairman of the JTB that a member of the Town Forum should become a non-voting member of the JTB; this was not permitted, but it was agreed that John could sit at the far end of the Board's table and away from the Board members to allow him to hear the meeting more efficiently.

The Town Forum were then briefed on the concerns that John had raised at the exploratory meeting, namely: the highway maintenance and standards, in particular the pavements; the on-street parking problems in Royal Tunbridge Wells and progress on the permit zones' revision and expansion; and Notices of off-street car parks beside every fee-paying machine.

Finally, John had sought another meeting with Robert Cottrill (Director of Planning and Development) and David Candlin (Head of Economic and Development) in conjunction with the Town Forum's Planning Committee to discuss matters further.

Housing and Environmental – June Bridgeman informed the Town Forum that the Soroptomist International had produced a leaflet that would hopefully be launched next week. The leaflet identifies 30 ways to reduce your carbon footprints.

An Exhibition was also being shown at the Library regarding the Heritage areas in the town which members of the Town Forum were urged to visit.

8. Any Other Business

- *Town Forum Activity/Results* - The Chairman reminded members of the Town Forum to make comment on the draft that was previously circulated regarding the Town Forum activity/results obtained.
- *Waste and Recycling Workshop* - The Town Forum was informed that a Waste and Recycling Workshop was taking place at the Camden Centre, Tunbridge Wells, on 11 December 2007, commencing at 7pm. The Environment, Safer and Stronger Communities Select Committee at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council were undertaking a review on waste and recycling within the Borough. Members of the Town Forum were urged to attend. Christopher Thomas, Daniel Bech, Karen Sergeant and Tricia Wright were all interested in attending the workshop.
- *Event regarding Memorial in Woodbury Park Cemetery* - June Bridgeman circulated a poster relating to "Interesting Memorials in Woodbury Park Cemetery". An event was taking place on 7 December at 7.30pm at the Town Hall and everyone was invited to attend. The event would explain the challenges of photographing and researching the Victorian monuments and the people they commemorate.
- *Royal Centenary 2009* – Members asked whether the Council was recognising the Centenary in 2009; Councillor Mrs Mayhew stated that the Council was looking at ways in which the Town could celebrate.
- *Councillor Attendance* - The lack of Member attendance at Town Forum meetings had been noted. They were encouraged to attend at future meetings. It was acknowledged that Councillors do have other functions to go to and that non-attendance was out of their control.
- *Strategy for the Town Forum: Some Thoughts* – Christopher Thomas drew the Town Forum's attention to the fact that over the past two years the Town Forum's views and comments had been served well by having a committee structure whereby Council papers/documents could be discussed and work undertaken.

Chris went on to say that a vast amount of time had been taken up by this process that could have been devoted to other activities, which were varied and could be seen as more productive. Chris proposed that the whole committee process be reviewed and in particular, the current chairmen stand down and that the Town Forum undertakes 'working parties' to tackle particular issues that are raised as and when.

Chris then listed specific issues, namely: promotion of the Town Forum to a wider audience, for example a newsletter, an article in the local newspaper etc.

Members of the Town Forum were asked to think about what they feel was wrong with the town? What would they like to see happen and what would they like to do? He asked that each person come up with at least 10 items and forward them to him at least three days before the next meeting of the Town Forum (Friday 3 January, Town Forum meets on 10 January). Councillor Mrs Mayhew also asked that members think about what they would like the Town to look like and what changes they would like to see for the future, short, medium or long.

Once all replies have been returned, they would be collated and those would then become the Town Forum's aims and objectives; the Town Forum would then evaluate the results at the end of the year.

The Town Forum members thanked Chris for his report and asked that before they agree to his proposals (see appendix B) they receive a copy of his report in order that that they could read his proposals more closely (see appendix B to these minutes). Town Forum members would then submit their views to Chris before the January meeting.

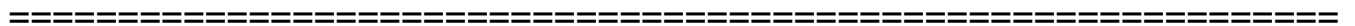
Action

8.1 That Christopher Thomas forward his report to all members of the Forum for their comments.

9. Dates of next meetings of the Town Forum – The Town Forum agreed to the following:

- Thursday 10 January 2008 at 7.30pm
- Thursday 7 February 2008 at 7.30pm – Workshop, Urban Parishing by Angela Woodhouse, Overview and Scrutiny Partnership Manager
- Thursday 6 March 2008 at 7.30pm
- Thursday 10 April 2008 at 7.30pm
- Thursday 15 May 2008 at 7.30pm
- Thursday 19 June 2008 at 7.30pm

10 January 2008 Town Forum - Any reports/short papers to be emailed/posted to Samantha Timms no later than 10am on Monday 17 December 2007.



Strategy for the Town Forum – Some Thoughts

Our attention over the past two years has been served well by having a committee structure, which was set up in such a way so as to enable us to answer the myriad of Consultation papers thrust our way and to look at local issues relating to those committees.

Whilst being given the chance to answer these papers this has taken up a vast amount of time, which could be devoted to other activities, which are varied and could well be seen as more productive

As we do not have a further meeting until 10 January 2008, I propose that the entire committee structure now be reviewed. I propose that each Chairperson of each committee step down and that the Town Forum look to having “working parties” to tackle particular issues that are raised as and when.

Specific issues for example include:

- Promotion of the Town Forum to the wider audience. To date we simply fall well short of whom we should be representing. While we have many Resident Associations and certain other group representatives on board, we do not have much further involvement with other groups/areas in our ‘patch’. It is true that we have tried to have people come, such as representatives from Sherwood, but we failed in not realising what they wanted to talk about, which is why they only turned up once or twice. Indications are that our conversation was too technical and not getting to their problems.

I am aware that John Goodfellow is involved with members of Sherwood in obtaining a crossing, however, this is only the tip of the iceberg. We must therefore give ourselves time to reach these communities. However, at the same time we have Councillors who may well represent their area, but do we ever get to hear from them what their constituent concerns are? Some Councillors do not even live in the ward they represent.

- How do we promote ourselves? Daniel has come up with an extremely good idea where he is prepared to create a newsletter for us all to distribute. Perhaps we can ask the Council to fund a simple black and white copy?
 - John Goodfellow has contacts to bring into the fold, but who else does? All ideas for contacts should be collated centrally so that we can start a simple contact database.
- Newspapers. Would they be prepared to insert an article into their paper about the Town Forum, which people could respond to by sending a letter to the Town Forum.
- Business, it has been muted but nothing happens.

Naturally, we must have flexibility as to who sits on whatever working party so that we, the Town Forum, can ensure that any activities that are undertaken are engaged with broad cross-town Town Forum consensus and are not left on the back burner. We must promote our 'Getting around Tunbridge Wells' report as an example.

If we have working groups we will not be in the position of having committees which do not meet for many months due to one reason or the other and we will also have time to engage in activities to promote the Town Forum to that all-important audience – not everybody has the internet.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like each member of the Town Forum, including Councillors, to think about what they feel is wrong with our town? What they would like to see happen. What they would like to do. I would like each person to come up with TEN items.

Following receipt of these responses, we will collate what you are saying and then we will concentrate on those aspects. There will become the Aims and Objectives of the Town Forum. Where there is a natural crossover of activity with groups, such as, the Civic Society or the Soroptomists, the Town Forum will support their aims and together we will achieve further objectives.

We will evaluate our results at the end of the year.

Thank you.

Christopher Thomas
Chairman of the Town Forum

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Ownership of Royal Victoria Place

(Action point 9.1 - 25 OCTOBER 2007 MINUTES)

In Action Point 9.1 on page 5 of the minutes of the Town Forum's meeting on 25 October 2007, I was asked to find out who owned the remaining 75% of Royal Victoria Place.

I spoke with Geoff Jones, the Centre Manager, on 23rd November. He emphasised that Westfield continues to be responsible for the management of the Centre from an operational point of view.

With regard to the internal financing arrangements however, the Company has investment partners. The business model here, he explained, was similar to that adopted by the Company elsewhere around the world.

(Westfield is an Australian Company, and sees itself as being as well-known in Australia as, say, Marks and Spencer is in the UK. Apparently the Company normally likes to "brand" its malls, although here in the UK we tend to go for local names.)

In the case of Royal Victoria Place, Hermes Pension Fund is a joint venture partner having a 50% stake, the remaining 25% being with investment banks.

Mr Jones confirmed that some form of roof covering for Ely Court was being planned, and that the Court would then also become a no smoking area.

Philip Whitbourn
24 November 2007

APPENDIX B