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## ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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### Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 30 October 2008

#### 1. Present:

Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Grahame Bell (The Pantiles Traders' Association), Jenny Blackburn (Rusthall Village Association), June Bridgeman (Soroptimist International), George Carey (Tunbridge Wells Access Group), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Peter Gemmill (Albion Road Residents' Association), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Christopher Thomas (The Chairman of the Town Forum and The Goodwins Nos1&2 Residents' Company/Woodbury Close Residents' Association), Alastair Tod (RTW Civic Society), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association) and Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association).

Councillors: Peter Bulman (Park), Peter Crawford (Broadwater), Mrs Mary Lewis (St James), Mrs Catherine Mayhew (Park), John Miller (Culverden), James Scholes (Pantiles & St Mark's) and Frank Williams (Sherwood).

Others in attendance: Lene Beynon, Borough Engineer; Graham Goddard, New Hospital Development Director, PFI, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust; Dawn Hollis, PFI Clinical Planner, PFI Project Team, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust; Richard Powell, TWBC Director of Services to the Community; and Samantha Timms (Town Forum Secretary).

#### 2. Apologies:

Councillors Robert Atwood (Rusthall) and Ronan Basu (Culverden), Betsey Dix (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Councillor Mrs Herriott, John Higgs (Hanover & Rock Villa Residents' Association), Michael Holman (TW Twinning and Friendship Association), Robin Hillier (Transition Tunbridge Wells), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Users' Association).

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#### 3. Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair

Christopher Thomas and Councillor Peter Crawford were elected Chair and Vice-Chair of the Forum, respectively. Michael Doyle proposed Christopher Thomas as Chair and was seconded by John Goodfellow. Altan Omer proposed Councillor Peter Crawford as Vice-Chair and was seconded by Michael Larsen.

Christopher Thomas and the Forum thanked Jenny Blackburn for all her hard work and commitment as Vice-Chairman over the past year.

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

#### 4. Membership Changes

James McGrath representing Norfolk Grange Management has withdrawn from the Town Forum. Tunbridge Wells Access Group became a new member of the Town Forum and represented by George Carey.

## 5. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 25 September 2008

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

**Matters Arising:** None received.

## 6. Action Outstanding from the Meeting dated 31 July 2008

### ON GOING ACTION

- 9.3 That all representatives from **any association/member to provide details of activities** that they had undertaken and/or want to promote to Daniel Bech in order for them to be included on the Forum's website so that all members could know what was happening. This is particularly important so as to avoid duplication of activity and to show a single voice for Councillors to deal with.

## Action Outstanding from the Meeting dated 25 September 2008

- 10.1 That Christopher Thomas write a letter to the Clerk of the Common, Rodney Stone, to seek clarification on the Private Parking Contract.

## Actions Completed from 25 September 2008 meeting:

- 7.1 That the Town Forum members submit their views regarding the LINK to the address or email address given at the meeting.
- 9.1 That any other association experiences similar problems with satellite antennas to contact Philip Whitbourn.
- 9.2 That should any Town Forum member have any speed limit concerns to contact John Goodfellow direct.

Councillor Scholes informed the Town Forum that he, as Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities, and Sheila Wheeler, Chief Executive, had both received letters in support of Britain in Bloom.

## 7. Reports from Borough Councillors

Councillor Mrs Mayhew – The Town Forum was informed that the Tunbridge Wells Gateway was opening on Monday 3 November. All customer inquiries will be dealt with at the Gateway and all existing reception points at the Town Hall will close. However, for the first two weeks after the Gateway opens, the main reception will be staffed to ensure that visitors are directed to the Gateway in person.

From 17 November, the front doors will be closed to the public and only available to staff via access control. Councillor Mrs Mayhew assured Forum members that the services the Council provides would still continue but would be in a different location, the Gateway. She went on to say that should members of the public wish to express their views on the new Gateway, they could speak with the Gateway Manager who would be based at the Gateway.

Councillor Mrs Mayhew stated that there was a new bus service, the 277 – this would run the spine of the Town to Sherwood every fifteen minutes.

The Town Forum was informed that the Cinema site planning application would be considered by Western Area Planning Committee on 12 November 2008 at 2pm.

The Town Forum agreed that Phillip Whitebourn should represent the Forum, attend the meeting and speak for three minutes on the application expressing the Town Forum's views.

**Action:**

- 7.1 That Phillip Whitbourn register to speak at the Western Area Planning Committee meeting due to take place on 12 November 2008 to express the Town Forum's views relating to the Cinema Site planning application.

Councillor Williams – Informed the Town Forum that Sherwood had held a public meeting to discuss the lake at Sherwood.

The stages so far as completed are an outline letter from Cllr Williams in August to 15 local notables, responses received to the above with discussion. Membership of the Open Spaces Society in September.

Leaflets have been distributed to 750 homes, with a Public Meeting in October. A further meeting of the newly formed FOSL (Friends of Sherwood Lake) will be held - then starting to collect signatures in November.

## **8. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust – PFI Hospital**

Town Forum members had previously agreed that representatives from Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust should attend the October's meeting to provide a presentation on the new PFI hospital – Christopher Thomas of the Town Forum introduced Graham Goddard, New Hospital Development Director, PFI, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust and Dawn Hollis, PFI Clinical Planner, PFI Project Team, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust.

Mr Goddard and Ms Hollis explained the developed concept design and site development control plan and gave the Forum a computer generated fly through the site – it showed the grounds, the layout of each room and each floor of the hospital was explained.

The Town Forum noted that the hospital was one of the first Acute NHS hospitals with all single rooms in the UK and supports significant change in primary and secondary care. | The hospital will consolidate the Kent and Sussex and Pembury services and centralize some Trust services. The Acute Clinical Model comprises of hospital within a hospital, emergency care centre, elective centre, woman's & Children's zone and diagnostic support.

The key dates were highlighted to the Town Forum, as follows:

|                        |                   |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Financial Close        | 26 March 2008     |
| Construction Commenced | 31 March 2008     |
| Phase 1a Handover      | 30 November 2010  |
| Phase 1b Handover      | 19 May 2011       |
| Phase 2 Handover       | 28 September 2012 |

Phase 1a – This would be transferring Pembury Women's & Children's services, Pembury Theatres, some of Pembury imaging and maintain current OPD on top of Pembury site.

Phase 1b – This would be transferring Kent and Sussex services, the rest of Pembury services and centralize as per Clinical Strategy.

The Town Forum thanked Mr Goddard and Ms Hollis for their attendance and in-depth presentation and answering questions.

**Action:**

- 8.1 That should any Town Forum member have any question(s) that they would like submitted to PFI hospital to send their question(s) to Christopher Thomas at christownforum@btinternet.com by 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

## 9. Public Conveniences

Richard Powell, Director of Services to the Community, attended the meeting and presented to the Town Forum options and considerations to be taken into account in relation to public conveniences.

He informed the Forum that the Council had a savings target for 2009/2010 in the amount of £800,000 and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council received only 12% of the Council Tax, the remainder was shared between Kent County Council, Kent Fire and Emergency Services, Parish and Town Councils and Kent Police. The Borough Council does not receive any money from the National Non-Domestic Rates (Business rates), that money goes direct to Government.

There were several challenges that faced the Council namely:

Were there service types which the Council could provide more cheaply?

Were there services that could generate income?

Were there services that could be provided by partners?

Were there services the Council could cease to provide?

The Council would also need to consider whether or not the services were discretionary or non-discretionary; was there pressure on services that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council was not obliged to provide.

It was also mentioned that all services were scrutinised for efficiencies and more cost effective operation and now there was new pressure from the credit crunch.

Mr Powell stated that provision of public conveniences was a discretionary service in accordance with Section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936. The current provision of public toilets was 21 across the borough with an overall cost of £340,000 to operate. The Council's Cabinet set a target saving of £100,000 and a new operational contract would be in place from 1 April 2009.

Public toilets were available at many locations, namely: Crescent Road Car Park, Union House, Linden Road, Dunorlan, Grosvenor, Hawkenbury, St John's, Wellington Rocks and Calverley Parks. Facilities were also available at various town and village locations, such as: Southborough, Sissinghurst, Paddock Wood, Matfield, Lamberhurst, Horsmonden, Hawkhurst, Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Capel, Brenchley, Bidborough and Benenden.

Customer use of the conveniences varied from around 3000 per annum (Benenden) to 130,000 per annum (Crescent Road Car Park), with operational costs ranging from £4,840 (Benenden) to £68,250 (Crescent Road Car Park).

Mr Powell stated the Council had received a new Government Strategy from the Department for Communities and Local Government titled "Improving Public Access to Better Quality Toilets".

Various options were being discussed with rural towns and villages, some of the options were:

To transfer the conveniences to local group or parish  
 To have local responsibility for cleaning  
 To replace the facility with a local alternative  
 or  
 To take action to remove the facility altogether

However, the town centre issues were:

The facility was too expensive due to the cost of full time attendants  
 Facilities were heavily used by town centre customers/visitors and  
 That there were alternatives around, such as Royal Victoria Place, individual shops, bars and  
 restaurants.

Mr Powell asked the Town Forum to consider the following and inform him of any  
 options/ideas.

- Close the town centre public toilets? Rely on commercial provision with a Community Toilets Scheme.
- Reduce operating costs? Introduce new layouts to diminish attendant requirement (possibly individual unisex units to disability standards, individually accessible via exterior doors).
- Introduce charging? The estimated cost of 20p charge would generate £13,000 at each of the two town centre public toilets (assuming 50% use).

The next stage would be to conclude the discussions taking place with stakeholders, submit a report to the Council's Environment, Safer and Stronger Communities Select Committee and Cabinet.

The Town Forum thanked Mr Powell for his attendance and presentation and answering questions. Mr Powell's presentation is appended to these minutes for the Town Forum's information.

**Action:**

9.1 That Town Forum members taking the above into consideration and forward their views and suggestions direct to Richard Powell as soon as possible:  
 richard.powell@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

## **10. Replacement Town Entry Signs for Royal Tunbridge Wells**

Lene Beynon, Borough Engineer, attended the meeting and updated the Town Forum on the new town entry signs.

The Town Forum noted that the existing eight signs on the approach roads to Royal Tunbridge Wells were cast iron with original Tunbridge Wells arms and crest. The twinning signs were of an inferior quality and had been added at a later date; the signs had been repaired over the years and most of them were now beyond repair and needed to be replaced.

Lene explained that the replacement of the signs would provide an opportunity to redesign the signs and a working group had been set up with representatives from the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to agree the design and final design of the signs.

The working group consisted of: Town Forum members - Christopher Thomas and Michael Holman. TWBC Ward members – Councillors Basu and Williams. TWBC Environment, Safer and Stronger Communities Select Committee – Councillors Atwood and Mrs Herriot and TWBC Portfolio Holder for Environment and Street Scene, Councillor Barrington-King.

The group met on 13 October 2008 and discussed and agreed a design brief and officers had now carried out a design. Upon the Forum agreeing the design, it would be presented to the Environment, Safer and Stronger Communities Select Committee on 18 November, followed by Cabinet on 2 December 2008. To enable the new signs to be installed for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Twinning with Wiesbaden on 22 April 2009, the signs would need to be ordered by the end of December 2008.

The Forum was given a description of the arms and crest, and as Royal Tunbridge Wells (the town) does not have a unique arms and crest, the new signs would use the arms and crest granted in 1976 to the borough of Tunbridge Wells.

The Town Forum expressed thanks to Lene for her hard work and agreed to the new sign design and looked forward to its placement at the entrances to the town without delays.

## **11. Reports from the Vision Committee and Working Groups**

Various Planning Matters – Philip Whitbourn updated the Town Forum on their recent meeting. Various matters arose:

Cinema Site – Two sets of revised planning details have been made available, one concerning the demolition of the existing buildings (permission granted in 2001 having now expired) and the second set that showed amendments to the top of the corner building.

It was hoped that the Cinema Site planning application would be before Western Area Planning Committee on 12 November 2008 as previously stated in minute 7 above.

Communities in Control - Improving Local Accountability – The Planning group had been studying the DCLG Consultation Document on local accountability and the response given saw a case for joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees, when the Borough and County responsibilities overlapped. Concerns had also been expressed about the lack of visibility and accountability of public officers, especially where the County was concerned.

Medway Depot Development, Grosvenor Bridge – Philip stated that although not all aspects of Fairview New Homes' scheme for the Medway Depot site was to everyone's liking, two features were particularly to be welcomed. One was the proposal to make improvements to Robert Marnock's landscape in the adjoining Grosvenor Recreation Ground, and the other was the provision of a more satisfactory entrance to the Recreation Ground from Quarry Road, Grosvenor Bridge and Lower St James' Road.

Ely Court, Royal Victoria Place – The canopy system had now been installed over Ely Court and that 'White Stuff' and Crabtree and Evelyn's premises had been refurbished. A liaison meeting was taking place on 3 December with the Director of Planning and Development - the point that the old style Local Plan Policy CR3(b) would not feature in the new style Local Development Framework; this would be clarified at this meeting.

Vision and Arts Committee – No matters arising.

Transport Matters – No matters arising.

## 11. Any other business

Champions – Christopher Thomas informed the group that Champions had been agreed as follows:

Faith and Social Issues – Father Ed Tomlinson  
 Planning – Philip Whitbourn  
 Arts and Culture – Michael Larsen  
 Community – Daniel Bech  
 Parishing (Rusthall) – Jenny Blackburn  
 Health and Transport – John Goodfellow  
 Promoting Royal Tunbridge Wells Heritage and Enhancement – Alastair Tod  
 Environment Issues – Kate Sergeant  
 Cycleways, Parks and Leisure – Robin Hillier

Christopher went on to say that the purpose of the Champion would be to act as a focal point and promote where possible. The Activities of the Champions is appended to these minutes for Members' information (Appendix A).

DisabledGo Partnership – Councillor Crawford wished the Town Forum to be informed that the Council, working with the Borough's Access Group, had teamed up with DisabledGo, a National Accessibility Project, to develop a new online guide, which would set out how accessible many public and private venues in the Borough were to people with a range of impairments and conditions.

The guide would provide detailed information for 1,000 venues across the Borough to include hotels, tourist attractions, pubs, local libraries, train stations, leisure and entertainment facilities and council offices. The guide will empower residents to judge the disabled access to venues for themselves.

A consultation event is being held on Tuesday 18 November from 12noon to 2pm in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells. At the event, people can find out about what the new online guide will offer and will be invited to share what venues they think should be included in the guide.

For any further information, please contact [sarah.andrews@tunbridgewells.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.andrews@tunbridgewells.gov.uk), or Rachel Felton, Partnership Manager for DisabledGo at [rache.felton@disabledgo.info](mailto:rache.felton@disabledgo.info) or alternatively call 01438 842710.

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

- Thursday 27 November 2008 at 7.30pm - in attendance:
  - Sheila Wheeler, Chief Executive, acknowledging the work of the Town Forum.
  - Ailsa Paton of Town & Country Housing Association to give a talk on Domestic Abuse.
- Thursday 18 December 2008 at 7.30pm
- 29 January 2009 at 7.30pm - in attendance
  - Sean Clark, Head of Finance and Governance, TWBC, to advise on the Council's Budget and Special Expenses.
- 26 February 2009 at 7.30pm
- 26 March 2009 at 7.30pm
- 30 April 2009 at 7.30pm

27 November 2008 is the next full Town Forum - Any reports/short papers to be emailed/posted to Samantha Timms by no later than 10am on Monday 17 November 2008.

## 13. The meeting closed at: 9.40pm

**CHAMPIONS' ACTIVITIES/TERMS OF REFERENCE:**

- To work with Councillors and the Borough Council to promote residents best interests.
- To report to the Town Forum and post information relating to it upon the Town Forum website and to give updates when relevant at meetings.
- To convene working groups where relevant and co-opt fellow Town Forum members onto such group(s).

It is understood that where a Champion is involved in another organisation, then the activities of that organisation will remain that Champion's concern. However, if that Champion knows that identical activities are being done by both groups then he/she can report that to both groups so as to avoid duplication. This process will help all concerned.

It is further understood that where a Champion's sphere of activity overlaps with that of another then dialogue be held between those parties.