



# Getting around Tunbridge Wells

Residents' views



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

April 2007

## FOREWORD

Over 100,000 people live in Tunbridge Wells Borough; some 55% in and around what was once the freestanding town of Royal Tunbridge Wells, and the rest scattered in rural towns and villages.

Some of their affairs are dealt with at County level, notably transport, and some like planning by the Borough Council. But by a quirk of history — and unlike anywhere else in the Borough — the 46,000 residents of the former Royal Tunbridge Wells have no town or parish council to speak up for their collective interests.

The Tunbridge Wells Town Forum (TWTF) was set up almost two years ago to try to fill this representation gap. Through its membership, which is drawn from the town's Residents' and Community Associations as well as the Civic Society, Soroptimist International and local Borough Councillors, the TWTF pulls together the views of a wide cross-section of the community.

The TWTF believes that residents' voices must and should be heard, not only on day to day quality of life matters but on the difficult issues, the agenda setting issues. This discussion paper, the first in what we hope will be a series to address some of the things that concern us most, looks at transport in the town. For sure, it highlights problem areas but also it sets out ideas and initiatives for now and for the future, ones which are practical and sensible and come directly from the residents of our town.

Balancing the conflicting interests will sometimes involve some hard choices and setting priorities. We offer these ideas as a constructive way forward at a crucial time for Tunbridge Wells and we hope and believe that both Borough and County Council will respond in an equally open and meaningful way. We will report on their responses on our website [www.townforum.org.uk](http://www.townforum.org.uk).

If you are a community association that feels inspired to join the TWTF or if you just want your thoughts and ideas to be heard please contact us.

Matt Goodwin Chair  
Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

### *Note to this web edition:*

*The page numbers in this edition correspond to the page numbers in the printed edition. But it omits the blank pages which were inserted in the latter edition so that sections etc start in it on a facing page. There are consequent gaps in the page numbering in this edition.*

# GETTING AROUND TUNBRIDGE WELLS: RESIDENTS' VIEWS

A discussion paper by the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Traffic and transport problems score consistently high among local people's concerns. This discussion paper looks through the eyes of local residents at how they might be tackled. It welcomes the decision to draw up a Town Plan and new Borough transport strategy. A key challenge is to provide a strong framework and active measures to reduce local transport problems.

A better balance should be struck between the needs of people on foot and those in vehicles. Clear maintenance standards and better supervision of contractors must be put in place. Six priorities are identified for action to reduce congestion and provide a more acceptable environment:

- i. **sustained support for public transport** including buses, rail, taxis, private hire cars and novel forms of shared transport to encourage a switch between modes. Public transport priority for road space should be a key part of this to maintain and increase reliability and reduce costs;
- ii. **restrictions on heavy lorries** in the town centre, with limitation to prescribed routes elsewhere. Loading bans on busy streets at peak times should be strictly enforced and out of hours deliveries promoted;
- iii. **reduction of day-long on-street parking, with tough enforcement action** against pavement parking and other parking infringements. The proceeds of fines to be used to pay for local parking and public transport improvements;
- iv. **significant expansion of the vehicle free zone** around Five Ways and a shift in balance to favour pedestrians over vehicles down the spine of the town. Buses and licensed taxis would use this area, but other vehicles, such as cars and goods vehicles have only controlled access;
- v. **long-deferred Park-and-Ride schemes** to be pressed ahead, making use wherever possible of existing bus routes, and associated with major new peripheral car parking;
- vi. **urgent discussions with rail undertakings** to improve rail links beyond Tunbridge Wells as a key part of transport infrastructure, to foster park and rail options and to explore how major property and parking developments could improve Tunbridge Wells Central and High Brooms stations.

Over 50 aspects of road and traffic management are looked at together with suggested remedies ranging from removal of badly placed advertising-boards from pavements and better bus information, to a Shop-mobility scheme that serves the whole shopping area and a design guide for street lighting. Top traffic danger spots are identified as a wake-up call for town planners and traffic managers. They include Vale Road, Upper Grosvenor Road, Carr's Corner, the Pembury Road, and the "Berlin Wall" of heavy traffic that cuts the Common off from surrounding residential areas.

Looking further ahead, some long-term strategic issues are identified that must be addressed if Tunbridge Wells is to develop solutions to its traffic problems and secure the infrastructure resources needed as a Regional Hub in the South East

It calls on Councillors for a detailed response to its proposals and suggests a "residents' champion" is appointed inside the Town Hall to make things happen.

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## Part 1: Introduction

### Residents' concerns

1.1 Traffic congestion and transport problems score consistently high in any list of local people's concerns. We decided that *Getting around Tunbridge Wells* should be the subject of our first Town Forum publication.

1.2 It looks through the eyes of some of the 46,000 residents of Royal Tunbridge Wells<sup>1</sup>. Unlike the many thousands of people who come to the town daily to work, shop, attend schools, or as tourists, this is where we and our families have our homes and spend a large part of our lives. We have the biggest stake in its future.

1.3 We want to be able to walk safely round our neighbourhoods in pleasant clean surroundings, and for our children and elderly or disabled relatives to be able to do so too. We want to be able to reach other places and meet friends easily, with the convenience of a car or easy access to public transport to get around the town, to go to the main shopping areas, work, outings and the hospital, and to make longer journeys. And we want our town to be thriving and attractive with flourishing businesses and well-stocked shops.

1.4 To combine so many things in a historic densely-built area traversed by through traffic inevitably involves conflicts of interest and compromises. But the root issues must be tackled now, because it is plain that this town cannot cope with its growing volumes of road traffic and the strains they are putting on its infrastructure, its appearance and the quality of life. The consequences are not only disagreeable but highly damaging. A key part of the remedy must be to make it easier for people to leave their cars at home and to get around comfortably on public transport or on foot or cycle.

1.5 By an accident of history, and unlike every other part of the Borough, we have no collective voice in the form of parish or town council to speak up for us. The Town Forum hope this discussion paper will help to fill that gap. Its aim is to help the process of agreeing clearer transport priorities and a more balanced set of policies that put the interests of local residents at their heart. We want a fresh approach to problem-solving and determined action to change things for the better. We want smooth working, not buck-passing or wrangling, between Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Kent County Council as transport authority to deliver the goods. We welcome the Borough Council's decision to prepare a plan for the town of Royal Tunbridge Wells and review its transport strategy. One of the main challenges will be to provide a strong framework and active measures to reduce local transport problems and their impact on local people.

1.6 The "central square mile" of the proposed town plan is the core of the area where the Town Forum acts as residents' distinctive voice. This is the historic place that visitors travel to

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<sup>1</sup> The area of the former Borough of Royal Tunbridge Wells, now represented by the wards of Broadwater, Culverden, Pantiles and St Marks, Park, Rusthall, St James, St Johns and Sherwood.

see and enjoy, flagship and economic heart of the whole Borough, designated Regional Hub<sup>2</sup> and daily magnet for tens of thousands of people — most of them using private cars — drawn in from a wide area stretching deep into East Sussex.

1.7. The present catchment area of Royal Tunbridge Wells bears little relationship to its administrative boundaries. It sits right in the fringe of a large county whose transport preoccupations and financial priorities lie elsewhere, and abuts another whose inhabitants make extensive demands on the town's roads, parking and other facilities without contributing to their cost. On-the-spot transport knowledge, and considerable foresight, skill and determination are needed to fight its corner effectively. When they are lacking, the consequences are all too obvious. Worsening congestion, potholed roads, neglected and badly repaired paving and street furniture, malfunctioning traffic management systems and a degraded environment as parked vehicles commandeer residential roads and open spaces.

## Aims

1.8 Thankfully, the Borough Council now recognise the risks of letting others with different agendas continue to shape the town for them. We hope therefore that this ideas paper from residents' point of view will do two things:

*First*, we wanted to capture what residents saw as the most important things to be done about the general transport and traffic situation in the town in the medium term — a priority setting exercise. This seemed likely to be a useful input from the people on the spot to Borough and County plan-making and priority-setting;

*Second*, we wanted to set out in one place the long-standing local concerns and grievances of residents, along with their practical ideas about resolving some of them. Dealing with these matters constructively and promptly would help to remove many long-standing sources of aggravation and criticism. Looking at them collectively seems likely to offer practical entry points into wider problems and could pave the way towards better working partnerships with local residents to assist problem-solving.

All these are matters about which the people who live here hold strong views and where they want firm action. Our voices need to be listened to and our ideas about the future taken on board. Tunbridge Wells is *our* town.

## What we did

1.9 Our starting point was to review the various transport and street scene concerns repeatedly voiced at Forum meetings, and the unsatisfactory responses by officialdom. Information was collected and circulated to the Forum about current transport plans and responsibilities, good practice elsewhere examined, then all the Forum residents' associations invited to have their individual say about the main issues they saw and to offer ideas about priorities for action. A planning meeting of representatives from each of the Forum's committees was followed by a workshop evening for all the residents' associations to discuss key issues. This was supple-

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<sup>2</sup> Tunbridge Wells /Tonbridge has been designated by the South East Regional Assembly as one of the "Regional Hubs" to have priority for national transport investment.

mented by a written trawl of local residents' views about road danger spots, ideas for immediate action, and long-term priorities. A remarkable amount of consensus emerged.

### **What this document covers**

1.10 **Part 2** describes the main transport topics examined during these various processes and the ideas which emerged on each.

1.11 The *ABC for Action* at **Annex A** lists together many specific longstanding local problems and possible remedies for them. The places where residents feel most at risk from traffic are identified in **Annex B, *Dangerous Places***.

1.12 **Part 3** brings together all the findings from Part 2 and the annexes in an overview, identifies priorities for action and sets out proposals for the way forward.

## Part 2: Residents' transport problems in Royal Tunbridge Wells

### The topics

2.1 Six major transport topics were chosen to focus discussion of residents' problems in getting around in Royal Tunbridge Wells, namely:

- i. Traffic congestion
- ii. Parking policy
- iii. Pedestrians
- iv. Public transport
- v. Environmental impact
- vi. Major transport innovations needed for a "Town for Tomorrow".

In each case we looked at the main issues and identified what we would like to see done about them. Not surprisingly, the topics identified for discussion raised overlapping issues viewed from different angles, some generated identical priorities and some raised conflicts between goals. These will need to be resolved within the overall plan-making process but some were felt to have greater weight than others with residents. We return to these priorities in our overview of our findings as a whole in Part 3.

### (i) Traffic congestion — issues and priorities

2.2 Traffic is steadily growing and congestion increasing. The present situation has been aggravated by:

- badly planned locations;
- failure to invest in transport infrastructure;
- selfish car use;
- inconsiderate parking;
- children being driven to school;
- inflexible work times.



A further factor is that although many of the congestion and parking problems in Tunbridge Wells are created by the daily heavy flow of vehicles into the town from East Sussex, the district and county plans and budgets there offer no contribution to coping with them.

2.3 Priorities for early action are:

- audit of key junctions, one way systems, traffic light timings and mini roundabouts to adjust them to perform more effectively within the present limitations;
- early major park and ride schemes, well-publicised and with strong backup measures to encourage use;

- better planned and publicised bus and other travel connections;
- encouragement of more car sharing, perhaps through TWBC website;
- staggered attendance hours for the schools that use the A26;
- routing heavy lorries away from town centre roads.

2.4 Looking further ahead, Councillors need to take a more radical long term approach and be prepared to adopt bold plans to encourage people to use alternatives to cars and to deflect traffic away from residential areas. There has to be much more joined-up thinking on infrastructure planning to avoid creating new traffic pressures. Close liaison is needed with East Sussex County Council on the whole roads and traffic situation and prospects — so far this has only had lip-service. For example, if major diversionary routes for heavy vehicles and a possible new link from the A21 to the east of Tunbridge Wells to the A26 to the south are to be created, this will need close cooperation between the two counties. More imminently there are also closely shared interests about plans for rail services including threats to these as well as possible initiatives for the future.

## (ii) Parking policy in RTW — issues and priorities

2.5 The Council needs to clarify where it stands on the strategic issue of increasing or reducing off-street public and private parking spaces, and where within this the priorities for the use of available parking space are to lie. More and more residential streets are being overwhelmed by solid phalanxes of commuters' cars lining kerbs from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday and increasingly on Saturday. They are reduced to single track roads with passing places, and in many cases much of the pavement is lost as well. Three big issues for residents are:



- insufficient off-street parking;
- conflicts over residents' and commuters' or shoppers' priorities for use of public road space for private parking;
- illegal and inconsiderate parking, particularly on pavements or near junctions.

2.6 Key early measures should be:

- park and ride schemes all around the town;
- tougher action on parking infringements, eg parking on yellow lines and pavements, and the taking of powers to make all pavement parking unlawful save where signs permit it to happen;
- new one-way traffic systems where parked cars on both sides have narrowed streets;
- consideration of more bans and more 2 hour limits on daytime street parking;

- owners of private business parking to make this available to the general public at weekends;
- examination of effects of restricting residents' parking permits to one per household.

2.7 Longer term:

- more car parks are needed either in the shopping area or on the fringes with easy bus or walking access;
- an underground car park might be considered under the Common fairground, associated with other measures. On its own it might simply draw in more cars.

**(iii) Pedestrians — issues and priorities**

2.8 Key issues for residents are how to make it easier for themselves and their children to move easily and safely around the town, the respective priorities for pedestrians and vehicles, and how to cater for the whole of journeys that combine walking and vehicle use.



2.9 A safer town for pedestrians is needed, with the balance tilted in favour of those on foot or with a disability. Priorities for early action are to:

- make better provision for crossing the road all round the perimeter of the Common and at Vale Road;
- police the “bus gate”, where the ban is ignored by many vehicles;
- remove obstacles on pavements ranging from parked cars to A-frames outside shops and badly located pavement cafes;
- properly maintain the brick pavements as a historic feature of the town. Their attrition and replacement with tarred patches over the years is deplorable.

2.10 Longer term priorities are to:

- create more pedestrian zones and possibly low-speed zones around the town;
- take up the issue of remote responsibility for local highways matters. Powers should be given back or delegated to the Borough to deal with more local transport matters.

#### (iv) Public transport — issues and priorities

2.11 Good public transport is vital to improve the functioning of the town and secure its future. Buses are currently a key element, but in a town with relatively poor bus coverage many people use taxis and hire cars, or lifts from friends or relatives to get around. In the town centre there needs to be less emphasis on the car and more on pedestrians and public transport. Bus stops need to be near houses and desired destinations, and users also need to be confident that vehicles will always turn up and get them there on time. Priorities for early action are:



- better timetable information at the Library, RVP and station, and improved presentation at bus stops;
- reliability and frequency of buses, with bus lanes used as “transit lanes” shared with taxis and hire cars, and tougher enforcement, eg with fixed penalty cameras;
- better matching of vehicle size to routes, with smaller buses in many locations;
- review of local routes and the location of stops, including slight re-routeing of the 281 to provide easier bus stop access and better connections with the Pan-tiles;
- getting the Five Ways taxi stand up and running, and opening the bus lanes and the Bus Gate to taxis and hire-cars, so as to speed up taxi journeys and reduce charges;
- starting park and ride using existing bus routes.

2.12 Longer term priorities should be to:

- shift the balance to give pedestrians priority through the heart of the town, but with public transport sharing the road space down the central “spine” of Mount Pleasant and the High Street;
- examine how to improve the “whole trip” ie both the public transport and the walking parts, including ease of access for disabled people and those with young children;
- discuss with the rail industry how the rail link between the town centre and High Brooms might be adapted and stations revamped to improve access between the town centre, trading estate and Knights Park;
- review comprehensively the functioning, accessibility and layout of public transport at the Central station, jointly with Network Rail;
- re-open the rail link to Eridge and beyond where there is ample parking.

## (v) Environmental impact — issues and priorities

2.13 Key issues are environmental impact, severance and stress of heavy passing traffic; the destructive and intimidating effects of large vehicles; and the impact of commuter parking on residential roads. Simultaneously, the traditional features of the townscape are being degraded by shoddy maintenance, destruction of historic pavements and street furniture, and their replacement with low grade, out of scale and inappropriate materials



2.14 Priorities for early action are to:

- restrict heavy lorries in the town centre;
- proclaim RTW a “heritage town” (if need be self-styled) and establish a code of aesthetic and environmentally friendly standards to apply to all future street hardware.

2.15 Medium to long term priorities are to:

- pedestrianise more of the town centre and develop a network of connecting interesting byways;
- accelerate Conservation Area review concentrating on street-scene aspects;
- re-open rail links from East Sussex;
- move the St John’s bus depot, probably to the Longfield Road area if the difficulties of getting past the railway embankment can be solved;
- develop a policy that favours smaller low-emission cars in the urban area;
- build multi-storey car park at Sainsbury’s where there is already an excellent frequent bus service and potential rail links to other parts of the town;
- identify other sites suitable for large-scale parking, associated with frequent shuttle buses into the town centre.

## (vi) Major transport innovations in a “Town for Tomorrow”

2.16 The TWBC Strategic Plan says “It is essential that new development does not take place without adequate infrastructure” for the “Town for Tomorrow”. Regional Hub status makes that even more important. Tunbridge Wells ideally needs to:



- unify links between the bottom and top of the town with accessible and environmentally friendly transport along the central spine and pedestrian priority;
- reshape the Vale Road area and provide better links to the Common;
- review the decision to expand RVP because of its likely impact on traffic generation and congestion, and make movement around the town a key consideration in any major regeneration partnership with a developer;
- create new crossings of the barrier of the north/south railway formation;
- upgrade both Tunbridge Wells Central and High Brooms stations as important transport and shopping nodes, possibly associated with a rail “people shuttle” between the southern and northern ends of the town;
- develop a major road link via between the dualled A 21 to the east of Tunbridge Wells and the A26 to the south, as the only practicable new bypass of the town;
- develop new strategic east/west road link in East Sussex as an alternative to A264 cutting through the middle of Tunbridge Wells;
- build major “out of town” new parking provision, with good bus shuttle links and consider selective new town centre car park provision, possibly underground, coupled with a widespread ban on street parking;
- reopen and upgrade rail links offering commuter parking at Eridge and beyond;
- establish planning criteria for private employers parking, depending on clear long term strategy to increase or to reduce this.

## The “ABC for Action”

2.17 Part of our preparatory work had been to bring together items of concern identified by individual residents associations and others that emerged as part of the “Grot Spot” exercise. During the discussion of the six key topics, further such items emerged along with ideas for tackling them. All this material has been assembled in *Annex A: ABC for Action* and is reflected in our overview in Part 3.



## “Dangerous places”

2.18 That overview also includes some wider issues arising from the survey which we conducted of residents’ perceptions of traffic danger spots. Chief among them are:

- the impact of heavy fast traffic cutting off pedestrians from enjoyment of the Common and reducing its use as a walking route. Crossing any of its perimeter roads on foot can be a risky and stressful business, particularly if accompanied by dogs or children;
- the blind corners, narrow pavements and polluted air of Vale Road and the hazards of crossing between Mount Pleasant and the High Street or across the station forecourt entrance. A major rethink is needed about movement around this area;
- the conflicts and hazards for pedestrians and motorists alike on the main traffic routes to and from the Trading Estate and Pembury Hospital via Upper Grosvenor Road, the Longfield Road junction with the A21 and the Pembury Road with its feeder roads. These are likely to worsen as traffic grows.



2.19 The frequent mention of the dangers for pedestrians at Carr’s Corner and from heavy traffic along St Johns Road/Mount Ephraim reaffirmed findings from a survey of women’s views in 2001 about problems they face moving around the town, especially with young children.

## Part 3: Overview and next steps

### Our general findings

3.1 Part 2 and the annexes have looked at six main types of local transport issue and associated problems through the eyes of people who live here with their families. Residents have a special stake in the town's future. In this concluding part we offer an overview of what has emerged from our review as an ideas agenda and set it in the context of some of the big planning issues that face Tunbridge Wells.

3.2 A properly functioning town must cater for people of all ages and all incomes so that when they go out of their front doors they can move around safely and enjoy their surroundings. That is plainly not happening. Congested roads and growing volumes of traffic are increasingly degrading the quality of life in Tunbridge Wells. It is time for a new balance to be struck within the town between the needs of pedestrians and vehicles.

3.3 Clear standards are needed for street furniture and surfaces appropriate to a historic town such as this and better supervision of the quality of work carried out by contractors is long overdue. Much more could be done to engage local people to help with that.

3.4 At a more strategic level, transport planning has to look across a wide area and certainly across the artificial administrative barriers between Kent and East Sussex. Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge have been identified as a Regional Hub within the South East as a whole. The solutions to some of the town's problems and the development of its future will affect many people who live outside its boundaries, and who are quite naturally vocal and protective about their own concerns and agendas. Major infrastructure investment will have to draw on a wider pool of resources than those of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council or even Kent County Council alone — for instance Central Government grants, railway investment, East Sussex road building programmes and the private sector. This will need a robust case and lengthy skilled negotiations.

3.5 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's past short-sightedness has not helped matters. Nobody has been charged with the needful strategic transport thinking and negotiating skills to ensure the Borough can argue its corner. Understandably no voices are being raised within East Sussex County Council or Weald District to resolve issues that lie on the Tunbridge Wells side of their boundaries. As for Kent County Council, in their eyes the priorities lie elsewhere than with a reasonably prosperous town on its extreme fringes.

3.6 Moreover even where local transport decisions are being made within Kent or the borough itself, the collective voices of the 46,000 people of Royal Tunbridge Wells, lacking as they do a town or parish council to speak for their cumulative interest, have not always been adequately heard amid the clamour of other interest groups and institutional arrangements.

3.7 The proposed sorely-needed town plan for Tunbridge Wells is a welcome step towards putting some of this right. How to help people move around the town more easily will be a crucial matter for that plan. So too will dealing with the threats posed by present and growing

traffic volumes and competing bids that Tonbridge or other places may make for the money available to the Regional Hub.

3.8 Skilful traffic management can only do so much. There are still some big improvements to be made there, but these cannot stem the growing tide of vehicles and trips. A new balance needs to be struck, with the car and lorry taking second place to pedestrians in the town centre, measures to reduce the flood of commuter cars, a crackdown on selfish parking and on flouted regulations.

3.9 Simultaneously there must be attractive other forms of transport and access installed to offer people choices for getting into and around the town, including for those with disabilities. That will require some bold action and dedicated resources to secure the wider payoffs.

### **Six priorities for action**

3.10 Viewed through residents eyes, this points to six main priorities for action to reduce congestion and provide a more acceptable environment:

- i. **sustained support for public transport** including buses, rail, taxis, private hire cars and novel forms of shared transport to encourage a switch between modes. Public transport priority for road space should be a key part of this to maintain and increase reliability and reduce costs;
- ii. **restrictions on heavy lorries** in the town centre, with limitation to prescribed routes elsewhere. Loading bans on busy streets at peak times should be strictly enforced and out of hours deliveries promoted;
- iii. **reduction of all-day on-street parking, with tough enforcement action** against pavement parking and other parking infringements. The proceeds of fines to be used to pay for local parking and public transport improvements;
- iv. **significant expansion of the vehicle free zone** around Five Ways and a shift in balance to favour pedestrians over vehicles down the spine of the town. Buses and licensed taxis would use this area, but other vehicles, such as cars and goods vehicles have only controlled access;
- v. **long-deferred Park and Ride schemes** to be pressed ahead, making use wherever possible of existing bus routes, and associated with major new peripheral car parking;
- vi. **urgent discussions with rail undertakings** to improve rail links beyond Tunbridge Wells as a key part of transport infrastructure, to foster park and rail options and to explore how major property and parking developments could improve Tunbridge Wells Central and High Brooms stations.

### **Longer term strategic issues and resources**

3.11 Looking further ahead, it is worrying that there is no perceptible long term strategy:

- to create a major new link between the upgraded A21 to the east of the town, and the A26 to the south of it;
- to address the prospective new inbound traffic demands from traffic generated by the dualled A21 and by an improved A228 by-passing Colt's Hill;

- to find an alternative route for the East-West traffic cutting through the heart of the town on the A264;
- to improve the existing poor and often hazardous access from the town to its trading estate and Pembury Hospital;
- to use the potential of the railway proactively as a long-term planning tool to redirect some of the area's transport flows, rather than simply reacting to the plans of national railway operators.

3.12 These fundamental issues about how people and goods are to move about the town in the longer term have to be thought about now if we are indeed to have a “Town for Tomorrow” fit for the people who live here, and if Royal Tunbridge Wells is to secure in competition with other claimants its proper share of the basic infrastructure that it will need to serve as a strategic Regional Hub.

### **“ABC for Action”**

3.13 This exercise has also brought together the host of practical suggestions set out in the *ABC for Action* in Annex A. That lists over 50 aspects of road and traffic management where things could be done right away to make local people's lives safer and pleasanter, ranging from removal of badly-placed advertising-boards from pavements and providing better bus information, to a Shop-mobility scheme to serve the whole of the shopping area and a design guide for street lighting.

3.14 Each and all these matters must be promptly addressed. We fully recognise that resources are severely limited. Low cost or new approaches are suggested with this in mind. Many could be built into initiatives already in hand, or be achieved by clear standards and proper supervision of contractors. These are the hazards and annoyances that people encounter every day outside their own front gates. Cumulatively they damage everybody's lives and destroy trust in the commitment and competence of the public authorities responsible.

### **Tackling “Dangerous Places”**

3.15 Last but not least it is striking how, in our survey of perceived traffic danger spots, people from all across the town have repeatedly mentioned the same handful of places. It is quite wrong that residents should be cut off from the pleasures and benefits of the town's Common by a Berlin Wall of traffic, and that a walk along Vale Road to the station or to cross from Mount Pleasant to reach the High Street with a child is so hazardous and unpleasant. The list of places identified in Annex B is a wake-up call both to the town planners and to the traffic managers.

### **What we want to happen next**

3.16 We have spelt out in this paper an agenda of ideas that people on the ground have suggested. We want:

- this discussion paper to stimulate debate and practical action and to become part of the decision-making process about the future of our town and where major new resources need to be sought;

- its findings to be reviewed and built into the Town Plan, the proposed update of the Borough Transport Strategy and the roll-forward of the Community Plan;
- each of its list of practical remedies to be looked at carefully and prompt action taken. For too long, local people - with no parish or town council to speak up for them- have seen their concerns ignored or tackled only superficially;
- energetic action by the Borough Council to ensure that the interests of the people who actually live in Royal Tunbridge Wells are properly identified and given much greater weight;
- Kent County Council, as suggested by the Department of Transport, to look closely at the way their policies and actions in practice impact on people on the ground;
- Kent County Council as a matter of management competence to get decent performance out of the contractors paid to carry out repairs and maintenance;
- the batting to and fro of transport issues and priorities between County and Borough Council, arguments about who does what and who pays, and all the delays and aggravation that creates, to stop;
- Kent County Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council jointly to provide us with a detailed response to each of the matters raised in this discussion paper, with firm undertakings and a timetable;
- appointment of a “residents champion” at a senior level in the Town Hall not just to field complaints and relay messages to hidden destinations but to knock heads together and be accountable for making things happen. This would be a practical demonstration of true partnership with the local community.

## ABC for ACTION

This annex lists some transport-associated problems experienced by local residents and the remedies they have suggested. In some cases the cause is failures in highways authority management performance, aggravated by poor communication with local people. Other matters have languished due to lack of means or will to carry them forward as part of a wider agenda — a situation that is now hopefully changing for the better.

Recognising that resources are limited, the suggested remedies are intended to be practical, visible and perhaps occasionally novel ways of moving matters forward. In many cases these suggestions could be followed up as part of Council work already in hand eg reviewing the Quality Bus Partnership and Park and Ride. Others could involve initiatives and action by the community as well as public authorities, and ways need to be sought to make that easier. We believe a partnership approach could in some cases open up new possibilities.

Each and all of the items in this list needs to be addressed in some way — now.

### **A**ccess for elderly

*Problem:* Ageing population needs easy access, good pick-up and dropping off points, safe level surfaces to walk on, places to sit.

*Remedy:* Transport audit of older folks needs on foot within RTW maybe by Age Concern and Access Group. Extend and upgrade Shop-mobility scheme to cover whole shopping precinct. Develop and enforce car and taxi set-down and pick-up points. Review street seating in relation to these.

### **A**ccident-prone A-boards

*Problem:* Boards set out on the pavement by shops and cafes can be a menace to pedestrians especially disabled people.

*Remedy:* Good practice guide to be adopted by all RTW businesses, including street cafes. Traffic wardens to report observed pavement obstructions.

### **B**us priority

*Problem:* To compete effectively with cars, buses must be punctual and reliable. Giving them reserved road space disadvantages and delays other traffic.

*Remedy:* Encouraging modal shift is crucial. Extend network of bus lanes or bus-only streets, but increase lane utilisation and public benefit by making available to all forms of public transport including taxis, hire cars, shuttle services and designated new forms of shared vehicles.

## **B**us stops and shelters

*Problem:* Vital for bus users, but many badly designed and placed. Conflicts of private owners' advertising aims and best practice for travellers and pedestrians. Fragmented hardware ownership and responsibilities.

*Remedy:* Council BQP performance standards to require individual nameplate for each stop ("Monson Road" "RVP") showing bus numbers using it and places served; stylised LT-style route maps in shelters and on bus stops; readable timetables at the correct height; shelters provided at all key staging points (and all route 281 stops), with benches at others; shelter design requirement to allow clear sight-line to approaching buses not obscured by advertisements; real time bus information at key stops (as in Brighton); broken seating repair performance standard of 3 days.

## **C**rammed car parks

*Problem:* Weekend shoppers can find it difficult to park. Commuters want free all-day street parking on weekdays and can displace residents. Commuters' parking is taking over more and more residential streets, dis-benefiting neighbourhood shops and creating a metal wall around the Common. Closure of John Street car park creating shoppers' problems in that area. Fierce competition for parking round High Brooms Station. Car parks are usually unsightly and can be anti-social places.

*Remedy:* Establish if weekday employers will make car parks available for public use at weekends. Reopen John Street car park with some 2 hour time limits. Clarify within overall transport strategy, where to instal or increase dedicated public car parking and set ground rules with clear rationale. Set design standards.

## **C**ycling

*Problem:* Healthy, useful but hazardous, and only marginal to solving congestion problems. Needs safe routes and crossing places.

*Remedy:* Consider shared footways with pedestrians where space allows. Cycle speed restriction and cycle bells to be obligatory on shared footways. Set and achieve target dates for completing promised cycle routes. Create cycle routes across Common.

## **D**readful depot

*Problem:* St John's bus depot is noisy, smelly, a visual blight and adds to road congestion.

*Remedy:* Move to industrial estate or south of Sainsbury's and use all "going in" and "going out" trips to the depot as service to improve bus links to that area rather than running empty. Planning conditions to ensure development on vacated depot site reduces rather than adds to local parking pressures.

## **D**estination details

*Problem:* Impossible to identify buses from side or back, and destinations alone do not communicate what route they take. Maps are poor in design and presentation.

*Remedy:* Improve bus destination blinds or put large printed cards in windscreen. New standards and placards for bus side and back markings, improvising if need be with decals. Display bus routes on bus stops as in London. Arriva to provide pictogram style route maps with named stops, and display these as standard item inside all vehicles to encourage use of other services.

## **D**irty and hard to see street name plates

*Problem:* These make navigation difficult, cause risky hesitant driving and make local areas look neglected inviting vandalism.

*Remedy:* KCC to publish sign cleaning schedule for RTW or use TWBC as contractor. Where cycle very infrequent for cost reasons, discuss with local people schemes for volunteer cleaning, defect reporting and replacement to agreed standards eg by residents or local school help groups. Review siting to increase visibility.

## **D**isabled difficulties

*Problem:* Badly placed street furniture, steep kerbs, narrowed spaces, ad hoc obstacles create special problems for different forms of disability.

*Remedy:* Update and apply good practice code. See also **A-boards**.

## **D**ownsizing vehicles

*Problem:* Large nearly empty buses and bulky vans create unnecessary congestion in RTW and are unsuitable for residential roads.

*Remedy:* Smaller buses except on routes with heavy carryings. Permit only small light vehicles for low volume/low frequency deliveries in congested areas.

## **D**ug-up and obstructed roads

*Problem:* Badly coordinated utilities programmes causing long delays. Restricted working hours compound this. Private contractors work on roadside properties making excessive and protracted use of the highway and of pavements for lorries, skips, scaffolding etc.

*Remedy:* Permit conditions, charges (including penalties) and tough time limits on all private use of public space. Contract requirements for maximum use of daylight hours.

## **E**asy-access vehicles

*Problem:* Currently number in use is small, restricting mobility for disabled. Costly to buy.

*Remedy:* Set out Borough strategy and numerical goals. Encourage switch through licensing and grant-making powers. Offer incentives eg limited access to some zones or streets for suitable vehicles only. Investigate cost of interim modest adaptations (eg extra grab rails).

## **E**nergetic enforcement

*Problem:* Apart from town centre parking wardens, virtually no enforcement or police engagement. Low or absent kerbs encourage pavement misuse. No systematic programme for creating low cost self-enforcement, seeking residents cooperation with associated measures.

*Remedy:* Creative use of texture and colour when repairing and resurfacing to send strong visual signals. Approved bollards or other deterrents for agreed areas eg grass verges might be “sponsored” by local residents. Road repairs to incorporate high kerbs save where specific disabled access points. Use planning conditions for model self-enforcing layouts by developers.

## **E**nvironmentally friendly vehicles

*Problem:* As “clean and green” town, RTW needs to promote lower vehicle carbon emissions and other noxious footprints. Council Parks department uses some liquid gas vehicles, but units bulky and costly.

*Remedy:* TWBC and KCC set anti-pollution standards for all their own and contractors vehicles and use licensing powers, parking permit pricing system, and other tools available to promote switch to low pollution vehicles by transport operators and general public.

## **F**easible fares

*Problem:* Perceived journey cost influences travel choice. Proposed “free fare” system for school children still will cost each child £50 up front. Council gives only low profile to old age concessions, presumably to hold down costs from increased take-up.

*Remedy:* Long-term congestion and money payoff comes only if significant transfer out of cars. Vigorously promote both schemes to secure significant modal switch with inventive marketing - eg card-holding young person discounts at sports facilities or cinema; big posters “Do you know you could have made this trip free” and high visibility notices in car parks, sports facilities and schools.

## **F**lagrant flouting

*Problem:* No direct retribution (see **Energetic enforcement**) for unlawful parking, loading and use violations including making perpetrators pay cost of damage.

*Remedy:* Get tough. High penalty levels, accept photographic evidence, proactive wardens, CCTV and fixed penalties. Construct and advertise scheme for using fines money for local transport benefits, not general Council revenues.

## **F**ront garden hard-standings and kerb removal

*Problem:* Paved over front gardens increase off-street parking but are unsightly and environmentally damaging through increased run-off. Frequent pavement crossovers increase hazards for pedestrians including unaccompanied children and blur distinction between pedestrian area and moving traffic.

*Remedy:* Council to formulate pedestrian friendly and environmental policies re hard standings in front of premises where this requires pavement crossovers and kerb removal.

## **G**ate

*Problem:* Buses-only "town gate" is most flagrantly flouted traffic regulation in RTW, causing much public irritation. Illegal use increases hazards to pedestrians and encourages offenders to ignore other restrictions. Police can't/won't spare resources to enforce.

*Remedy:* Press KCC to instal fixed penalty camera. Review how extension of pedestrian area and Five Ways upgrade can build in better enforcement features and distinctive "portal". Encourage volunteers to monitor with photographs. Selective exemplary enforcement.

## **H**heavy vehicles

*Problem:* Large commercial vehicles and heavy contractors equipment create big problems in narrow streets as well as being intimidating, noisy and smelly. Cause expensive damage when driven onto pavements.

*Remedy:* Weight and size limits in town centre and some roads. Restricted access/loading hours at heavily congested sites. Require to pay full repair cost. Seek advice from other towns in UK and abroad on deliveries. Tough sanctions on companies flouting law.

## **I**information famine

*Problem:* Navigation information round RTW combines clutter and dearths. Few pictograms. Findings of Signage Working Party have sunk without trace. Town cries out for travel information centres near Five Ways and the station.

*Remedy:* Revisit past work on signage and take decisions. Promote travel information centres and leaflets for all forms of public transport and disabled access at the Library, RVP, Tunbridge Wells railway station and the Pantiles.

## **I**llegal signs

*Problems:* Increasing numbers of private notices on lampposts, road sign stanchions and verges. Unlawful, unsightly, dangerous distraction to motorists.

*Remedy:* Clear KCC and TWBC policy statement against this, including who is empowered to remove the notices. Phone and email number for the public to report breaches of the law/ email photographs with prompt action response. Warnings to perpetrators that repeat offences will result in prosecution.

## **J**oining-up the town

*Problem:* Elongated hilly nature of RTW creates problems for those unable or unwilling to walk far.

*Remedy:* Town shuttle service further promoted and enhanced and redirected down High Street. For longer-term, develop creative planning solutions along the "spine", with priority for

pedestrians and buses, a selective “park and walk” strategy, and initiatives to foster contributions by railways, park and ride and private businesses.

## **K**iller crossings

*Problem:* Some spots in the town pose special traffic hazards to pedestrians and to motorists and restrict choices and access.

*Remedy:* Part 3 lists main problem places cited by residents in survey. Look at each to assess immediate risk. Longer term design out problems through re-planning areas and traffic movement.

## **L**amp posts

*Problem:* Good lighting makes navigation easier and safer at night. Lamps form significant part of street scene. Badly designed and managed lighting creates visual intrusion and wastes energy. Heritage style lamps costly to maintain and replace.

*Remedy:* Agree TWBC “heritage design guide” for all lighting provision, maintenance and replacement. Lights to switch off automatically in small hours and tight performance standard to rectify malfunctioning lights. Residents might contribute to and help maintain some heritage lamps.

## **M**inimum pavement width

*Problem:* Pavements formerly wide enough for comfortable usage have been eroded by cycle paths, vehicles parked legally (as along parts of Mount Ephraim) or illegally (as in most places), vehicles overhanging from inadequate hard standing on frontages, overgrown vegetation; publicly installed metal barriers, posts, stanchions, junction boxes, bus shelters, rubbish bins etc. Some pavements impassable with push chair or wheel chair, and some for anybody, others a slalom course.

*Remedy:* Clear policy on whether or not it squares with pedestrian policy to narrow pavements to benefit vehicles. Minimum-width standard for pedestrians with push chairs and young children, and wheelchairs, universally applicable. To apply also to minimum clearance of fixtures, movable items like café chairs/flower boxes. Overhanging car parking and unkempt hedges to be reported by parking wardens or notified to street scene officer to take it up at premises concerned.

## **M**ediocre maintenance

*Problem:* Inappropriate or no standards, shoddy work by contractors, historic backlogs of maintenance, imprecise responsibilities and low priorities contributing to erosion of traditional town landscape. Illegal driving onto pavements, especially bricks, even for brief periods, creates costly damage and ruins newly repaired features.

*Remedy:* Publication by KCC of performance standards for repairs and maintenance, replacements, inspection schedules as starting point for dialogue about a code of practice and “reclaiming our heritage” programme. Encouragement of voluntary preservation initia-

tives. Much tougher enforcement regimes against damage. Work out cost/benefit ratios of repair costs and preventative measures.

## **M**ulti-storey and underground parking

*Problem:* Some multi-storey or underground parking eg for park and ride, or at rail heads makes good strategic sense. But can attract more vehicles to the area, look intrusive and ugly, cost a lot initially. Underground parking very costly and disruptive to build. Can create no-go areas for nervous people.

*Remedy:* Investigate possible options at High Brooms and Sainsbury's car park. Build revamp of Torrington into major make-over of station area. Identify potential feeder sites eg Sainsbury's car park, under the Common.

## **N**ight-time Travel

*Problem:* Bus services stop in the evenings. Rail stations, car parks and lonely street corners are threatening places at night. Drink and drive don't mix. Need safe places to wait. There is no top of the town taxi stand.

*Remedy:* Press ahead with installing top of the town taxi stand with CCTV and a safe place to wait. Improve car park security. Investigate novel forms of shared taxi and franchised taxi/bus services to offer central pick-up combined with flexible drop-off.

## **O**ne-way streets

*Problem:* Extensive on-street parking makes two way traffic very difficult in some areas, and rules out waiting for anyone.

*Remedy:* Review options for one-way traffic management, creation of "passing bays". Associate with measures to ensure faster moving traffic and obscured sight-lines do not create road safety hazards and severance.

## **P**ark and ride

*Problem:* Car users wishing to access town centre or other key destinations lack ability to park on outskirts then use bus or train.

*Remedy:* Press ahead with trial schemes. Consider locations along existing well-used bus routes. Discuss with Network Rail and Southeastern Trains policy plans re car parks at stations south of RTW.

## **P**avement cafés

*Problem:* Pleasant places for people to linger, but can reduce public circulation and sitting space, cause disabled access problems and generate litter.

*Remedy:* TWBC and KCC to agree code of practice as condition of licensing pavement use and ensuring hazards and litter are not created.

## **P**avement parking

*Problem:* Unsightly, damages pavements and verges, blocks pedestrian and wheelchair access, creates road safety hazard, breaks the law, no enforcement by police.

*Remedy:* Strictly enforce where powers exist. Accept photographs as evidence. Take powers to make pavement parking unlawful save where notices permit it.. Reinvest fines in publicly endorsed strategy for parking and bus provision (see **Flagrant Flouters**). Discuss with residents and Disabled Access appropriate low cost physical deterrent measures.

## **P**edestrian areas

*Problem:* Only a small part of the town centre is car free. Linear shape complicates more comprehensive treatment. Elderly and disabled cant walk a long way to get transport. Need to consider access for supply vehicles.

*Remedy:* Strong public support exists for more pedestrianisation. See points above on **Access** and **Joining-up the town**. Easy access to public transport essential. Combine with creation of a clearer town-centre focus, new landmark features and seating, enhanced and interesting back streets, venues for street markets and entertainment events.

## **P**ick-up points

*Problem:* Lack of pick-up provision obliges vehicles to wait at spots that create hazards and congestion. Side of Tesco a glaring example.

*Remedy:* As recommended in SI Taxi report, review this as an essential part of audit of existing town centre traffic management. Consider as matter of urgency provision of Tesco pick-up point.

## **Q**uestionable parking places

*Problem:* Badly located official parking places in some traffic congestion spots exacerbate problems.

*Remedy:* Review parking places eg at Mount Ephraim/London Road junction; Bayhall Rd as it narrows near Kingswood Rd junction; Farmcombe Rd next to lower junction with Cavendish Drive, upper end of Grove Hill Road.

## **Q**uick, punctual and reliable

*Problem:* What a successful public transport service needs to be to persuade people to choose it in preference to a car. Congestion, infrequent services and unreliability a major obstacle to this.

*Remedy:* Maintain policy of providing and extending bus lanes, dedicated bus only roads. Investigate traffic light transponders. Investigate with Arriva provision of home or mobile phone- accessible information service to check for late running or cancellations. See **Bus and taxi lanes, Bus stops and shelters, Information**.

## Railways

*Problem:* Run down stations with poor disabled access and difficult surroundings. Threats to cut services at stations “down the line” could seriously worsen RTW parking problems. Expensive fares. Railway formation cuts RTW off from northern industrial and trading estate.

*Remedy:* TWBC and KCC hold urgent talks with Network Rail, Southeastern Trains and East Sussex County Council to influence railway plans and aspirations on services, railway property development and station parking. Push for reopening of Eridge link. Explore long term rail role in functioning as Regional Hub.

## Residents' rage

*Problem:* Commuters park all day in areas with only limited road space for residents' cars. Some vehicles partly block roads.

*Remedy:* Council to review where street parking restrictions should apply and 2 hour time limitations. Review eligibility criteria for permits. Consider creation of extra residents parking provision, limited to one permit per household, at market rates.

## Routes

*Problem:* Some bus routes have not adapted to changed settlement and work/shopping patterns. Others make lengthy pick-up detours that extend journey time. Many parts of the town poorly served.

*Remedy:* Ask Public Transport Forum to conduct exercise to identify what changes desirable. Consider rerouting 281 down the High Street.

## School traffic

*Problem:* Heavy concentration of schools near busy A26. School runs by parents add to or extend peak congestion. In the afternoon waiting cars block roads and create safety hazards. Pilot concessionary travel will still cost £50 pa and do little for primary school problem.

*Remedy:* Develop walking bus and shared cars schemes for every primary school. Reduce up-front fee. Encourage parental car-sharing schemes for secondary schools. Vigorously market old age concessionary fares scheme (see **Fares** above). Discuss staggered school timings.

## Speed

*Problem:* In some urban roads, fast traffic, particularly large vehicles poses safety threats for pedestrians, adds to noise and to difficulties crossing roads.

*Remedy:* Review speed limits, low-speed zones, and associated traffic calming measures.

## **T**axis and hire-cars

*Problem:* Past TW plans ignored role of hire-cars and taxis as public transport for areas lacking buses and those without cars, particularly at night. Decision to instal much -needed stand at the top of the town is welcome but no sign of delivery. RTW virtually unique in not allowing taxis to use bus lanes or Bus Gate. High tariffs, congestion and traffic circuit detours push up meter charges unacceptably for poorly-off.

*Remedy:* Accelerate installation of Five Ways taxi stand. Encourage provision of call-up phones in safe locations. Authorise plated taxis and hire-cars to use bus lanes and bus gate to reduce delays and cost. Set up experiments with a "shared taxi" system. Build shared taxi and hire-car policies into transport strategy.

## **T**ricky turnings

*Problem:* Some eased L-hand turns could create less "swing out" and reduce delays eg Carlton Rd/Calverley Park Gdns; Claremont Rd /Grove Hill Rd; Farmcombe Rd/Claremont rd. Some R-hand turns could be made safer and quicker by central road markings, eg longer slot on London Road/Mount Ephraim, Langton Rd/Rusthall Old Coach Rd.

*Remedy:* Review these and other tricky spots subject to not disadvantaging pedestrians.

## **T**roublesome traffic-lights

*Problem:* Lengthy sequences at some junctions create tailbacks, eg Speldhurst/Yew Tree Road..

*Remedy:* Review all signal timings to match better flows and priorities, while safeguarding pedestrians. Fit more sophisticated control equipment at critical junctions. Consider mini-roundabout and a Pelican crossing to replace signals on Longfield Road by Curry's.

## **U**nhelpful Road Signs

*Problem:* Sequencing and location of some highways signage is poor and blurred by distracting added trivia. Key information lost in competition with other roadside messages. Crude sign stanchions installed mid-pavement create pedestrian hazards and contribute to grotty street scenes.

*Remedy:* Highways audit of sequencing and clarity. De-clutter and design improvement exercise starting in the town centre. Challenge and remove competing private notices and advertisements as safety hazards.

## **U**nloading vehicles

*Problem:* Some vehicles unload on double yellow lines or bus pull-ins on busy roads. Others park on pavements where their weight is particularly damaging. Without ready supplies small local shops and businesses could go to the wall.

*Remedy:* Council to discuss delivery alternatives and timings with shop-owners. Ask residents to collect names of vans and lorries regularly causing obstructions. Residents Association or

Council to write drawing attention of owner to repeated traffic offence and say will be reported to police if continue.

## **V**iolated verges

*Problem:* Grass verges ruined by parked vehicles of all kinds including Council contractors, BT and utility services. Some are outside housing association and other publicly financed properties and on Common.

*Remedy:* Environmental code of practice for all publicly financed contract vehicles strictly enforced with sanctions on offending employees. Agreement to accept photographic evidence from residents as evidence for disciplinary proceedings. Sanctions on transgressing tenants of housing associations, grant recipients such as Trinity Arts Centre.

## **W**asteful lighting

*Problem:* Some designs waste energy and create light pollution. Energy also wasted by failure to switch off in daylight hours.

*Remedy:* TWBC and KCC agree approved designs and replacement programme in light of environmental policies. Review of "lit" hours. Publication of code of practice and standards. Public actively encouraged to report lights out of hours with prompt response.

## **E**Xcessive speed

*Problem:* Excessive speed in built up areas poses a road safety hazard.

*Remedy:* Road humps, chicanes, "portals". Consider 20mph or lower speed zones associated with removal of pavement barriers and other street clutter within these.

## **Y**ellow line violations

*Problem:* See **Energetic enforcement**. Occasional selfish misuse of disabled parking blue badges

*Remedy:* As for enforcement. Strict checks of blue badges and warning letters where use creates hazards

## **Z**ones

*Problem:* In areas with many pedestrians or where young children play, moving vehicles create hazards and pollution and act as barrier to free circulation.

*Remedy:* Create zones where the pedestrian is paramount using combinations of a narrow entrance portal, road textures and colours, very low speed limits and selective traffic bans.

## DANGEROUS PLACES

We asked a random cross-section of residents<sup>3</sup> to tell us what they saw as the most dangerous places in Tunbridge Wells in terms of road safety

- (a) for pedestrians;
- (b) for motorists.

Altogether we received 76 responses about the hazards for pedestrians and 65 about those for motorists. Many residents are of course both.

This was not a scientific analysis of road-accident statistics, or of cost-benefit ratios for possible schemes to reduce them. What we aimed to identify was something which does not appear in official statistics, namely where people felt most unsafe as they moved around Tunbridge Wells. A known response to perceived personal danger of any sort is to avoid the place concerned either by taking a different route or by using a different form of transport, eg driving door-to-door to the supermarket rather than risking the walk along the narrow pavement or hazardous road crossing with young children. If that is not practicable, then special caution is exercised so that paradoxically a hazardous place may have a lower accident rate than an apparently “safer” one.

What was interesting from this simple exercise was how much general agreement there was about what constituted the most dangerous places in Tunbridge Wells.

### A. Hazards for pedestrians

Four main danger spots were clearly identified: three quarters of the respondents mentioned one or more of them.

#### 1. *Vale Road and station area*

A quarter of all responses picked this out as their top hate. The whole of Vale Road was seen as dangerous from the Common end (including using the pedestrian crossing) up to the junction with the High Street because of the blind bends, traffic suddenly appearing moving at speed, and the frightening effect of large lorries and buses impinging on pavement space as they swung round the tight curves. Two particularly hazardous spots were mentioned, namely

- crossing the access road to the station with vehicles turning in or accelerating out at speed, not least because they too have limited sight-lines and want to reduce the risk of a collision with another vehicle; and
- the particularly dangerous pedestrian manoeuvre that can be seen at any time of the day being carried out by elderly folk and people with young children namely the dash across Vale Road from the corner of Mount Pleasant outside the station to reach the High Street. An elderly woman was killed there a few years ago.

There has been a steady decay of shops in this stretch of road. Two shop-keepers who moved away from there cited the adverse impact of traffic on customers.

A different sort of hazard mentioned was the badly lit footpath from the station — a particularly menacing route at night because of recent attacks around the station on taxi drivers and on women.

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<sup>3</sup> These included a number of members of the Disabled Access Group.

## **2. *The Common***

The next most frequently mentioned pedestrian hazard, cited by 20 % of respondents, was the ring of heavily trafficked roads that divides the Common from the rest of the town. They mentioned Mount Ephraim, Major Yorke's Road and most frequently of all the London Road, from the junction with Mount Ephraim, down the hill opposite Smart and Simple Hotel with its blind spot with hedge/trees, then opposite Blockbusters. Lower down still, they mentioned the dangers getting across from Vale Road, crossing at the Pantiles end, the foot of Major Yorke's Road from the Fairground car park and the roads at Sainsbury's round-about at the end of Nevill Crescent.

## **3. *Grosvenor Road and Tesco***

16% of respondents mentioned this set of junctions as very hazardous for pedestrians. They identified the Grosvenor Road/Upper Grosvenor Road junction and various crossings by Tesco's with its traffic circuit round Meadow Road car park and down Upper Grosvenor Rd. This busy area is controlled by several sets of traffic lights with various pedestrian sequences and is heavily used by shoppers who also use it to catch buses home. The traffic engineers have been at pains to keep pedestrians out of the path of the streams of traffic channelled through it by hemming them in with stretches of guard railings. One of the features of this traffic management scheme, besides creating a heavy concentration of vehicles outside a busy supermarket, is to create a blind corner around into Hanover Road where vehicles wait on double yellow lines to pick up heavily laden Tesco customers, and a second blind corner where Upper Grosvenor Road emerges. Another is to maroon a block of shops, the only Town Post Office and Meadow Road car park on an island in the middle of the traffic circuit, cut off from the other shops in the town. It is not a comfortable and safe feeling place for shoppers, and many of its shops are struggling to survive.

## **4. *Carr's Corner***

The other most frequently mentioned place (by 13%) was the Carr's Corner crossing by Calverley Park Crescent, Lansdowne Road, and Calverley Road; then across Crescent Road itself at that same junction and further along beside the multi-storey car park when people cross to reach the Calverley Grounds entrance. This is on the main east west route through Tunbridge Wells, used by many heavy lorries. Near the car park entrance turning traffic and the lack of any central reservation make it very hazardous to cross the road.

Some other places each mentioned by several people were

- St Johns Road, both generally and specifically beside the new Sainsbury's Local which motorists also mentioned as a newly introduced hazard spot;
- crossing Monson Road from the Library opposite Prezzo with the unpredictable turning traffic and the cars slipping down Monson Way;
- Getting across Mount Ephraim where heavy flows of traffic are channelled along the narrow road between its historic buildings;
- getting across the Pembury Road generally; and
- Sibby's corner at the junction of Forest Road and Frant Road.

Places each with a single mention were the junction of Calverley Rd/Monson Rd/Camden Rd, Rusthall High Street, Warwick Park ("despite the speed humps") and Albion Rd where pavement parking obliged people to walk in the roadway.

Some people also identified broken pavements and badly-maintained street lighting, and traffic moving at excessive speeds as a safety hazard for pedestrians everywhere. Specifically suggestions were made for a well-enforced speed limit on Frant Road, Forest Road and London Road.

## **B. The main danger spots for motorists**

Once again over 70% of the respondents mentioned the same handful of hazardous places.

Far and away in the lead were the **junctions with Pembury Road of Sandhurst Road and Halls Hole Road/Blackhurst Lane**. 37% of people mentioned these as their unfavourite spots especially when turning right. These roads are used as important avoiding routes for local people who don't want to go through the clogged town centre, and provide vital feeders into the Pembury Road as the main east west route through to the A21 and Pembury Hospital as well as to the flagship Dunorlan Park. Their design, and the narrowness of Halls Hole Road, needs careful attention to maximise their usefulness for this purpose.

Next in order of frequency of mentions was the **traffic circuit to reach Mount Ephraim via the mini-roundabout by the United Reformed Church**. 17 per cent felt at risk on this stretch of road. **Others felt concerned about St John's Road north of that roundabout**, with its flows of school-run cars and the dangers of cars turning in and out of the new premises of Sainsbury's Local. There are big question marks over the wisdom of establishing new stores patronised by car-users turning directly in and out of this heavily trafficked and congested route.

10% mentioned the hazards of the fast-moving and weaving traffic on **the roundabout where Longfields Road joins the A21** and forms a cross roads to Pembury Hospital — only recently the scene of a serious accident. A further 10% quoted **Vale Road** with its blind bends and vehicles sweeping wide.

Other places mentioned were

- Carr's Corner;
- Beltring and Forest Road turning onto Frant Road;
- the right hand turns onto Mount Ephraim from Molyneux Park, Boyne Park and Royal Chase, and the Spa roundabout;
- Camden Road;
- Pantiles roundabout;
- Claremont Road school crossing;
- Church Street/old cinema crossroads;
- Farmcombe Road right turn into Forest Road;
- The single track road under the railway bridge to the Trading Estate.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that all these are spots where traffic and road engineers should take a close look. However tackling the parts of the town where people feel vulnerable or cut-off by traffic from the things they want to do, or where people feel apprehensive to drive requires more than accident prevention measures. Designing the problems out should be part of the planning strategy to make the whole town work more efficiently.