

Minutes of meeting held on 16th June 2008
between
Sheila Wheeler, Chief Executive, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
and
Christopher Thomas, Chairman Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

Herewith a summary of a meeting held with Sheila Wheeler on the 16th June 2008.

1.

We opened up by talking about highways and the impact it has on the town and beyond. I advised Sheila that I had sent a letter to Cllr Roger Manning and that we had yet to receive a response. Sheila, by chance, was in the process of drafting an email to Highways and said that she would raise with Adam Wilkinson why we had not yet received a reply. Typical items discussed were excess street signs, non replacement of like with like (bricks with bricks etc), badly maintained verges, lack of working street lamps, pot holes etc etc.

While it was agreed that KCC have had to struggle with taking on the new work I said that appreciation of putting up correct street lamps by contractors would be a good start and that common sense should apply. I raised the concern we held over the comments of Behdad Heratbar and his lack of concern over pavement parking. I also raised the fact the current KCC Road Safety Plan was out of date on the website and questioned how road safety decisions were being made.

Sheila suggested we have a return visit from KCC Highways as staffing has been subject to change, I agreed this would be a good idea and we need to schedule this into our meetings.

2.

The demise of Tunbridge Wells in Bloom was discussed. We know this event was axed due to costs but I put forward the concept that something should be done in the Summer to engage residents and retailers. Sheila commented this was certainly a very good idea and suggested we run this idea in common with the Love where we live campaign. It was agreed that the Town Forum come back to Sheila with ideas as to how our concept of a competition could work and who we feel we could find who would be able to judge the competition(s). This would be for summer of 2009.

3.

The Tourist Office situation at the Pantiles was discussed and Sheila confirmed that no decision had been made at present. I did raise our support would be given to the concept of touch screen Info Points like the one in Hastings. I pointed out that this had been raised as an issue at a previous Town Forum meeting. Sheila did say that Cranbrook has a touch screen info point.

4.

The station refurbishment was discussed. I advised we had discovered Southern Railways were responsible for the refurbishment and that we had secured an agreement by Southern Railways to consult with us. I did ask Sheila why it was that we had to discover for ourselves who was going to do the refurbishment while an

Officer in the Council was already aware. Sheila did say that she did not get told everything herself, but could see why we were concerned that such a major building with such a large impact on the town was of concern to us. Further, she could see that major buildings of this nature would always be on our watch list and that she would have a word with officers who were the liaison with the rail operators to see that matters of this type involving buildings with impact be advised to us.

5.

The tourist drums around town, which are all out of date and not well maintained were discussed. I put forward the suggestion that these drums could be maintained by J C Decaux. They receive advertising revenue while the TWBC has a well maintained information drum. I said that as we had been advised these drums were costly to maintain on a regular basis that the concept of J C Decaux maintaining them was sensible.

6.

The 100th anniversary of the Royal prefix was discussed. In short, the council is bound by Royal protocol and security requirements. When further information can be provided it will be. However, Sheila said that we could put forward ideas as to how to mark this anniversary. I suggested a water feature would be appropriate, as the Spa at the Pantiles was the actual reason for such a prefix. I said we were working on such a concept at the Pantiles.

6.

As a natural follow on we then reflected upon the Pantiles in general and Targetfollow. I did say that we had attempted to get communication with Targetfollow and that I had liaised with Jeremy Aldous and that he had said he would like Andrew Gower to sit on our Vision and Arts Committee. I then had to say how Andrew Gower did not attend the meeting and failed to even consider contacting us. This was a disappointment I advised, as we could not discuss the Pantiles and ideas we have. Naturally, this would have included the Water Feature, possible cladding of Union House and blocking off the road which dissects the two areas. Sheila said that she would ask Robert Cottrill to follow up on this as the Council had good working relationship with Targetfollow and come back.

7.

We discussed the Cinema site and the letter we had received from Network Rail advising us that they had only just become aware of any such activity to redevelop after the competition winner had been announced. Sheila did not concur with this statement from Network Rail so it was left at that. It was advised that at present everything was on target/time. (Credit Crunch dependent)

8.

I did mention the lack of attendance and input from certain Councillors at the Town Forum and did confirm to Sheila that we had just been invited by Roy to meet with Cabinet to see how the other side works.

9.

I did mention that our membership was also dependent upon not only ourselves, but also Councillors to promote the Town Forum. I asked Sheila if she was aware of any

lists of groups that could be invited to join the Town Forum. Sheila did say she would have a look into this. She suggested that lists held by Diane Talbot and Nazeya Hussain might be a good starting point.

10.

Ward Walks were briefly discussed. Useful information had been gained from the Sherwood Walk. The concerns raised tended to be around traffic congestion, potholes and dangerous junctions. These would be followed up in the feedback sessions.

11.

The West Kent Partnership was confirmed as a partnership where the Councils in question could work on common strategic subregional issues such as housing, economic development, infrastructure, lobbying with government and government agencies and funding bodies (SEERA, SEEDA etc) and also on crime and disorder as the area matched the police brigade command area.

12.

I raised our concerns over the paving of front gardens and raised Article 4 as a requirement not being used / insisted upon by Planning Dept, especially in the Village / places of architectural importance. Sheila took note.

13.

I did ask what protocols were held between KCC and TWBC and what was in them, as the Highways protocol had been ignored by KCC Highways. A fact confirmed by Cllr Mayhew at a Town Forum meeting.

14.

Grot Spots were naturally mentioned as they cover various aspects above. I did put forward the concept of having a grot spot update on a regular basis, although understandably Sheila did say that Robert Cottrill had a vast amount of work on his plate at the moment and that time was tight for generating spontaneous lists of work completed.

15.

I asked what the main Council strategy was for the next twelve months. Sheila advised that there were various major matters including appointing the Development Partner and securing the right partnership vehicle for this work, the "Master Plan", on which Sheila stressed we would be consulted and also confirmed that young people would also be consulted. Other matters at play were the Cinema site, the PFI Hospital, A21 dualling, and other road matters, Southborough Hub, the opening of the Gateway later this year etc.

16.

Sheila asked that we think about what we think would be a good Olympics Legacy. We need to put our thinking hats on! I said our Vision Committee could look at this.

17.

I asked Sheila's view upon underground parking. Great idea but her concerns were that the cost would be prohibitive.

18.

Sheila asked that we have meetings on a regular basis. It was agreed that three-monthly would be appropriate.

19.

I asked Sheila if she would be able to address the Town Forum at some point. Sheila did agree to this and was perhaps looking at October or November as she was already scheduled to attend the June meeting.

20.

Sheila said that she was looking forward to the meeting of the 19th June and I did raise concerns over recycling. This was discussed at some length. Sheila explained that while TWBC were high performers on recycling the fact was that across Kent there were huge variations in the levels of performance. The County and districts therefore needed to focus activity on those performing less well to ensure that overall we (across Kent) meet the government targets and are not penalised by fines. This would still rebound on the council tax payer as a KCC tax payer. It seems to be a Catch 22 so it maybe wise to support those other Councils rather than improve our recycling activity, which on the face of it does sound perverse, but unfortunately logical.

21.

Sheila confirmed that I should not feel that having seen her that I do not contact the Directors. A fact I embrace and will follow up.

Finally, I said to Sheila that our December meeting was a social meeting and would not be formal. I asked for Sheila to be present.

Here ends a summary of our meeting.

Christopher Thomas
Chairman
Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum