

Councillor Roy Bullock MBE
Leader of the Council

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Town Hall
Royal Tunbridge Wells
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Mr Christopher Thomas
Chairman
Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum
3 Woodbury Close
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4 June 2008

Dear *Christopher,*

Report on the Role and Performance of the Town Forum in 2006/07 and Key Residents' Challenges to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

I apologise for not responding to your report before now and I accept full responsibility for that lack of response. I would like to take your challenges one at a time and in the same order as presented in your report.

Lack of Leadership by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:

I cannot accept that since I took over as Leader, and certainly since the new Chief Executive was appointed, that there has been a lack of leadership in the Borough of Tunbridge Wells. I do not wish to comment on whether an elected mayor would be a feasible option, that is not for me to decide.

Designing the future of Our Town:

I do not accept your Doomday scenario that this town is in disintegration. Since taking over as Leader, I am fully aware of the tremendous amount of effort all the Officers of the Council are putting in to improve the appearance and vitality of the town. Indeed, some Officers have devoted nearly all of their time to that particular task. I would agree that there are some intractable problems and the failed Morrisons is proving to be one of those, but the Council has the greatest difficulty in interfering in the commercial negotiations between possible Lessors, existing Lessors and the freeholder especially when the majority of the negotiations are commercially sensitive.

I do not subscribe to your theory that the proceeds from the sale of the council housing stock is not being used in any planned or meaningful way. We do have a financial strategy as to how those reserves should be utilised and, of course, any utilisation should be across the whole of the Borough to the benefit of all of our residents.

Planning, the Infrastructure and the Environment

It is very difficult to accept your view that Planning and Planning Permissions in the town must be more assertive and forward thinking. That statement does not fit comfortably with Government guidelines about appropriateness and reasonableness. As to your assertion that we should require considerably higher and challenging energy efficiency targets for new build and redevelopments, you are fully aware we have a policy of improving energy

efficiency and you are also aware of the national targets we have to meet and which we intend to be proactive in attaining.

Building Communities:

It is not solely the Borough Council's responsibility to foster community spirit. Community spirit comes from the residents who live and work within their community. The Council is not the father or grandfather of its residents but it does have an enabling role. The amount of work we do in this area is considerable and quite possibly goes unnoticed and I am afraid I cannot contribute to your view in this particular paragraph.

Transport Infrastructure:

I am continually reminding the Forum that the Borough Council has agreed with KCC a transport strategy and at the time it was agreed by both Councils it was the first in Kent. Even now there are only two such strategies Kent-wide. For you to say that this council has substantially abdicated its responsibilities to its residents by its failure to engage appropriately in the development of the Kent transport plan, is to misunderstand the relationship between the two Councils. It is also a failure to recognise the amount of work that both the Member of Parliament and myself put in to ensuring that we continue lobbying at all levels for improvement to the transport infrastructure in the whole of the Borough.

Having said that, I do wish to congratulate the Forum on the way it has settled down and for the work it has done over the past two years. The only way to avoid some of the misunderstandings that have occurred in your report is to engage on a periodic basis with myself and other members of the Cabinet so that we each understand the others' view.

As for Councillors attending the Forum, I have emailed my Group and asked them to ensure that at least one of the Councillors in multi-member Wards attend the Forum, possibly on a rota basis. However, I do think that the Forum also has a responsibility to ensure that all parts of the unparished area are represented on the Forum and not just the "inner" town.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Roy Bullock MBE
Leader of the Council

Cc Cllr Catherine Mayhew