



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum - Community Plan Sub-Committee - 15 December 2005

Present: Dr D Bech (Chairman), Mr J Cunningham, Mr J Goodfellow, Cdr G Lawson, Cllr L Price, Mr J Syers, Cllr D Wakefield

Apologies: Dr M Larsen

Comments on the Community Plan.

Following on from the Community Plan Networking Event at the Spa Hotel on 25th November, Daniel Bech called a meeting of the Community Plan Sub Committee at which it was agreed that the Sub-Committee would not respond to the Community Plan questionnaire as they considered it was not asking the right questions and the answers to many of the questions posed to be self-evident. However, the following views on what needs to be done by the Borough Council and the priorities involved are set out below.

Cleaner Town:

A good start has already been made. This needs to be sustained if we are to achieve the knock-on effect that a more attractive environment can generate in the form of tourism and new business – not to mention civic pride.

Transport:

The top priority in this area of interest is the provision of affordable, frequent and convenient public transport. You will only get people out of their cars and on to buses if the alternative is cheaper than the cost of the fuel consumed by a private car, and the service is both frequent and convenient to use. This is the key to freeing up the streets.

Other measures that could help with the Town's transport problems are:

- (a) An extension of the "Walking Bus" scheme for school children.
- (b) The introduction of Park and Ride. This much debated proposal needs to be pursued by the TWBC with a great deal more determination and energy than has been displayed to date.
- (c) Extend reduced fares (on buses) further – say to school children, mothers with children, etc.
- (d) Pursue the possibility of a rail link with Sussex. A large proportion of road traffic comes into the town from over the Sussex border from Eridge, Ukfield, etc. The restoration of the rail link could make a significant reduction in road traffic into the town.
- (e) Establish a central transport hub. Morrisons (former Safeways) site adjoining the Station would be an ideal site for a bus rail interchange with a car park above it.

Business:

We need to establish what kind of business we want to attract and where we would like to see them established. This is particularly important in respect of the Town Centre.

It is clear that many small businesses fail because of high rents for business property and the excessively high business rates. Can the TWBC do something to help?

It is essential that the proprietors of businesses in the Town Centre are consulted and that we are aware of their views and problems when putting forward suggestions to the TWBC.

Tourism needs to be further developed. It is acknowledged that overnight visitors are more profitable than day visitors. It follows that the town should concentrate on providing attractions and accommodation that will encourage the growth of this type of trade.

Currently Tunbridge Wells is a Spa Town without a Spa! The present Union Square site which has little architectural merit would be a possible site for redevelopment as a Spa. The Spa itself would generate health based tourist trade but in addition, continental experience suggests that, the hotels and other facilities that come with a Spa tend to attract other business, e.g. conferences.

Tunbridge Wells also lacks a Civic Cultural Centre. The Town Hall site should be developed to meet this need together with an extended conference facility.

Licensing:

If the residents of Tunbridge Wells are to have confidence in the new Licensing system the TWBC must demonstrate that licensing decisions are being made with due regard to the impact that licensed premises have on the lives of those who live in the vicinity (i.e. the Town centre area). The TWBC must set up a register of complaints received from members of the public (including those received by other agencies involved with licensing) and that register must be available to the Licensing Committee and the general public.

Health:

The TWBC should do all within its power to ensure that the construction of the new hospital at Pembury goes ahead according to plan.

With an aging population and the movement of hospital facilities out of the town centre, the need for some equivalent and more accessible facility such as a Cottage Hospital arises. The TWBC should be active in seeking such a facility to be established in the Town.

Housing:

Whilst the TWBC has pursued policies designed to build sufficient new housing to meet government targets, little regard has been paid to the type of properties being built. This has resulted in a glut of expensive small flats and an acute shortage of affordable houses suitable for families. There is a pressing need for a stock of housing for reasonable rent to meet the needs of some 25% of the population who cannot afford to become owner occupiers. Housing Associations are not meeting this requirement and the "Right to Buy" legislation further exacerbates the problem.

There is a pressing need for an early reassessment and extension of the conservation areas within the Town Centre.

Infrastructure:

The TWBC should be more active in seeing that the rapidly decaying drains, roads and other services are repaired, replaced, extended and updated to meet the needs of the population of the Town.