



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Consultation on the Draft Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Leisure Strategy 2006 - 2011

As agreed by telephone conversation between Nigel Bolton, Head of Leisure Services, and Dr Philip Whitbourn of the Town Forum's relevant committee, the following comments are offered on the Council's Draft Leisure Strategy.

Section 1 – Introduction and Background

A Vision for Leisure in the Borough is set out beneath paragraph (1.10 – p.5) of the Strategy. It is a well-intentioned vision to which few could probably take exception.

The Vision is followed by a **statement of four priority areas** (1.12 – p.6) which, again, seem commendable in principle. - In particular, the Town Forum has shown strong support for meeting the needs of young people, following a presentation given to the Town Forum in April 2006. This concerned the relationship between the provision of sports facilities and anti-social behaviour in the Showfields and Ramslye areas of the Town. "Take away sport" was the message, "and you are left with bored kids". Vandalism and graffiti by bored 8-16 year olds has been a red issue in the town and one that clearly deserves to be addressed.

Section 2 – Leisure Services and the Local Strategic Context

In Section 2 there is set out **The Role of Leisure Services in delivering the Community Plan Priorities**. Some important points are made in this section, for example, in 2.6 (p.11-12): The keeping alive of The Pantiles, as the "heart of the Borough's tourism offer".

Further, in **The Role of Leisure Services in delivering the Council's Corporate Priorities and Objectives**, 2.7 (p.12-15), A2 CO8, Caring for our Environment: "The management of the grant to Trinity"

The service may wish to consider, however, whether such matters are sufficiently covered in the subsequent sections of the Strategy.

"A Day at the Wells", for example, was once the flagship of the Council's involvement with tourism on The Pantiles. Its premises now stand unused, and the strategy seems to offer no indication of a possible future for them in the next five years.

Section 3 – The Priorities for Future Leisure Provision

In Section 3 the priorities for future leisure provision are flashed out somewhat.

Priority 2 - Encourage safer and stronger communities by providing appropriate, quality facilities, services and activities.

In paragraph 3.10 (p.23) - the need for more strategic co-ordination with Town and Parish Councils about leisure facilities and opportunities is recognized. It is to be hoped that this will extend, also to the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum in this major part of the Borough where there is no Town or Parish Council.

In paragraph 3.12 (p.23) - the provision of park wardens in town centre parks is an important point, if anti-social behaviour and vandalism in our much-valued open spaces is to be kept to a minimum. – The point does not appear to be reflected though, in the subsequent Action Plan.

Section 4 – The Action Plan

Section 4 is followed by the Action Plan at Appendix 1. - This extends to 38 pages, and time has not permitted this study in full detail. Nevertheless, mention of a few specific items may be helpful.

Priority Action no. 1 – Increasing Participation.

Action no. 1 (iv) (p.2) – concerns “the Museum, Art Gallery and Library Project” about which the Town Forum had a presentation on 22nd June 2006, which was well received. It would be helpful for the Town Forum to be kept informed.

Priority Action no. 2 – Facilitating Provision of Appropriate Quality Facilities, Services and Activities.

Action no. 2 (xiii) (p.14) – “Sell Chase Woods (income 250,000)”.
It would be helpful to know the rationale behind the property sale of Chase Wood.

Action no. 2 (xiii) (p.15) – “Examine future management options for the Camden Centre”.
The outcome hoped for is “a well run community centre that is fit for purpose”, an end result that most people would probably welcome. There are, though, serious worries about the future of the centre, which is within an area that has been defined by the RVP authorities as under consideration for redevelopment.
Community facilities in the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells are in short supply and it would be helpful if the Town Forum could be kept informed about any matters affecting the future of the Centre.

Action no. 2 (xix) (p.17) – “Develop a Management Plan for Grosvenor and Hilbert Recreation Ground”.
To develop a management plan could be of considerable interest to residents in that part of the town. Again, therefore, it could be helpful for the Town Forum to be kept informed about progress on that plan. One important point that ought to be addressed is the need to improve access from Grosvenor Bridge, St James Road and Quarry Road. With the redevelopment of Medway Depot in prospect, this could well prove possible within the five year period.

Priority Action no. 3 – Facilitating Appropriate Provision to Meet the Needs of Children and Young People.

Action no. 3 (ii) (p.23) – “Installation of new pitches at Rusthall and Hawkenbury”.
This is also a matter on which it could be helpful for the Town Forum to be kept informed.

Action no. 3 (iv) (p.24) – “Explore the possibility of attracting an ice rink to Tunbridge Wells”.

Action no. 3 (viii) (p.25) – “Museum”
While this action “ensuring a minimum of 11-18 year olds on the user panel” may be commendable in its way, it is important that there should be a balance on the panel with older people who use the research and other facilities, and perhaps also tourism interests.

Lastly, one omission concerns the lack of an Open Spaces Policy in the Strategy Document.
At its meeting on 28th September 2006 the Town Forum was advised that, as a result of the Spafest events, the chairman had received a commitment from the Leader of the Council that TWBC would establish an Open Spaces Policy. This, surely, should feature in the strategy as a matter of urgency and it is, needless to say, one about which the Town Forum would be likely to take a keen interest.