

## **Draft - Response from the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum to the KCC PROW Improvement Plan Consultation - 15 August 2018**

### ***Introduction***

The spa town of Royal Tunbridge Wells is the main centre of population (50,000) in a largely rural borough of 116,000 people. The unique historic and commercial centre of the town and the surrounding green belt areas make it the subject of pressure for development and population expansion.

The town is already highly congested and proposed developments are likely to make it more so. Public Rights of Way are an important component of the travel network in the town and measures to increase their utility are to be welcomed. As such, we welcome the aspirations in the document, but are disappointed by the lack of detailed actions and, in particular, the budget in order to realise the stated aspirations.

We are not able to complete those parts of the consultation questionnaire requiring 'personal' information as we comprise a variety of organisations in Royal Tunbridge Wells. Our response below largely follows the layout of the online questionnaire with some additional comments.

### **Q . Was the ROWIP document easy to understand?**

1. The RTW Town Forum welcomes the PROW Improvement Plan and recognises the considerable effort to prepare the proposals clearly laid out in the document.
2. The current legal distinction between PROW and other paths crossing public parks and open spaces, commons and other sites is confusing and generally not understood by those who use them. In results in a disjointed approach to route planning, maintenance, ownership of responsibility and funding. Royal Tunbridge Wells has a wealth of PROW, public footpaths, other paths, back allies, shared pedestrian/cycle routes and extensive Commons - Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall – within its urban centre and residential areas. Despite being well used and a vital part of the character and function of the town centre, these assets don't all enjoy the same protection in law or have the requirements to maintain them for continued and accessible use. Administratively connecting these various assets and maintaining and signing them to a common standard would be beneficial.

### **Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we have identified the correct themes?**

3. We agree the six themes identified but suggest creating a 7th – "USER SAFETY". Fear of traffic speeds and pollution does not appear in your research, yet this is known to be a major disincentive to walking and cycling in both urban and rural areas. This is certainly our experience in Royal Tunbridge Wells and no consideration of PROW and other places where

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#### **Town Forum Management Group**

Adrian Berendt (Chair); Alex Green (Deputy Chair); Alastair Tod (Deputy Chair); David Wakefield (Finance); Jane Fenwick (Transport); Linda Lewis (Culture, Leisure & Tourism); Mark Booker (Strategic Planning); Michael Holman (Water in the Wells)

people walk and cycle can be made without recognising the detrimental impact of motor vehicles

4. The USER SAFETY theme should be high priority where PROWs and other paths run beside or across roads of various grades or where different types of users share the same 'road' space in both urban and rural areas. Mandatory safety measures such as 20mph zones, speed restrictions, signage, safe crossing places with refuges or user-controlled lights, should be among the measures employed as standard. USER SAFETY should be integral to the local borough and county planning and development processes.
5. The USER SAFETY theme would also cover a requirement to separate pedestrians and cyclists from motorised traffic on segregated or shared paths particularly on busy A and B roads and on all rural roads where local users (and potential users) require it for their safety. Typical situations would be footpaths/shared cycle ways from residential areas to the local primary and secondary school and community centre.
6. The RTW Town Forum supports large 20mph zones covering all residential roads in town and village centres across whole communities rather than only individual roads or streets. Only then will potential cyclists, and the young and elderly gain confidence to adopt healthier lifestyles in an environment where they make normal, short journeys within their community safely, quickly and pleasurably by foot or bike rather than by car.

#### **Q. The Delivery Plan details actions required to deliver each theme**

7. We have considerable concerns that this detailed Improvement Plan does not have a similarly detailed budget or budgetary priorities attached to it. It also does not explain where additional resource identified by £+ would come from, or how County level aspiration as expressed in this Improvement Plan and local need and demand will be fulfilled.
8. The RTW Town Forum's experience of KCC as the Highway Authority is not good; the cumbersome and remote decision-making process does not respond to local needs. We have long argued that a Royal Tunbridge Wells should have much more control over its own environment and be able to meet its local aspiration for an active travel environment to help cut traffic congestion.
9. We strongly urge that responsibility and budget for this Improvement Plan be devolved to TWBC so that it can integrate it with its already adopted plans for Active Travel within the town to meet local demand for an improved and extended pedestrian and cycling network. Integrating PROW, footpath, cycle ways and the many 'back alleys' within the town has a huge potential to transform lives and enjoying healthy and safe walking and cycling journeys around the town, and between nearby communities.
10. The maintenance of PROW and other paths (together with the related budget) should become the responsibility of the TWBC as the body best placed to prioritise the work. This will also generate interest from local groups in undertaking voluntary work to support and improve the network in a way that KCC or Sustrans cannot.
11. Devolving responsibility would also recognise the unique location of Royal Tunbridge Wells within the High Weald and would enable better coordination with other PROWs, such as East Sussex and Wealden DC, which the Borough adjoins.

**Q, Do you have any other comments on the ROWIP?**

12. References to a longer distance network for active travel are too vague. There needs to be a much stronger commitment to building a network of protected active travel routes within and between urban centres. E.g. a high-quality cycle route linking Maidstone, Paddock Wood and Tonbridge along the Medway to the existing cycle route through to Pembury and Tunbridge Wells is easily achievable and would be really beneficial.
13. The strategies need to be embedded in Local Plans, in planning policies and as conditions in planning applications, particularly for larger developments. E.g Each new development must deliver fewer car journeys through provision of an active travel infrastructure connecting to the local facilities and network of paths and cycleways.
14. More safeguards should be included to gain the commitment of landowners to maintain PROW on their land and to ensure these do not fall into disuse and/or disrepair.
15. We have produced a Green Network Report (see attached) which was welcomed by TWBC as a potential way forward to utilising our existing active travel infrastructure, improving and enhancing it and adopting healthier and more accessible lifestyle. The RTW Town Forum would welcome an opportunity to discuss this report and our consultation response with KCC officers.

Adrian Berendt

Chair, Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum