

Comments on the draft TCAP to supplement the overall response from the Town Forum

Prioritise the poor transport environment in Tunbridge Wells

The Town Forum Transport Working Group calls for the TCAP to focus on rectifying current problems with the transport environment in the town centre as well as supporting its development ambitions. More safer and cleaner transport options are urgently needed for residents and others with vehicle priorities amended to meet the town's climate change obligations.

RTW has retained its unique legacy of a Georgian town built on the 'healing' properties of its spa water and leisure pursuits. However, this legacy is becoming harder to appreciate because of congested streets and junctions, and challenging conditions for pedestrians and cyclists as heavy traffic and HGVs are routed through its narrow hilly streets in town centre. These comments on the TCAP draft highlight how this poor and damaging 'transport' environment has to be recognised and addressed at an early stage in this plan if it is to achieve its 'Principles and Ambitions' to refocus the town as a 'spa' with a modern vibrant community and economy .

While we applaud the Principles & Ambitions, applying a transport perspective brings some 'buts'.

1. **A distinct place? YES but** currently RTW is commonly viewed as congested with 'expensive' car parking; on-street parking clogging residential streets; dangerous for cyclists with no separation and no secure cycle parking; a challenge for pedestrians as safe crossing points are limited and there is close interaction with HGVs on narrow pavements; uneven and poorly maintained footways; pollution and limited pedestrian priority areas. Add to this growing levels of traffic on A26 by day and HGVs taking advantage of less traffic at night to speed through the town.
2. **Town Centre living – YES but** TCAP ignores/excludes the main residential streets between Inner London Road and Mount Pleasant Road, and the streets off Camden Road. They are directly impacted by the proximity of the town centre. Of particular concern is the traffic re-routing across the 'Public Realm'. Furthermore, new developments will add more elderly pedestrians who need safe crossings, well-maintained footways and a ban on pavement parking. Across the TCAP area the ambition must be to have fewer vehicles on the town centre's streets particularly HGVs, lower car ownership, no pavement parking, revision to the residents parking scheme, e-charging, car club/share schemes and more that is planned from the start.
3. **Connected landscapes: YES but** the TCAP should concentrate on pedestrians making these connections rather than vehicles by allowing for pedestrian priority at crossing places. Good signage, information boards, marked trails, and access to leisure walking routes in the surrounding countryside should also be considered. Many 'connections' are informal along quieter residential streets. For example, many visitors arriving by coach walk through York, Dudley or Lime Roads to the town centre. Their first impressions of the town is on a quiet and calm street with historic architecture rather than a busy road beside fast moving cars and HGVs. However, at the bus stand on London Road there is no pavement or safe crossing for them across London Road.
4. **Active Streets and 'nodes': YES but** currently the 'nodes' indicated are points of congestion and priority for vehicles, roundabouts hazardous for cyclists, and no safe pedestrian

crossings. London/Church Road, Carrs Corner, Vale Road/station, Frant Road/Pantiles, Crescent/Church/ Mt Pleasant 'nodes' all have vehicle priority and are well known hazards. The London/Mt Ephraim roundabout has safe crossings but too far from pedestrian desire lines at the roundabout. If these are 'gateways' the current car and HGVs priority has to be transformed.

5. **Low carbon future: YES but** we need a modern non-diesel bus fleet capable of running from residential streets outside the TCAP area, with bus interchanges within and bus stands outside this plan area. E-charging for electric bikes and cars should be in car parks rather than on-street.
6. **Sustainable and resilient economy: YES** - no additional comment.
7. **A creative destination: YES but** a flexible road network should be adaptable for hosting public events or holding a market without undue disruption; safe pedestrian access to popular events in the Pantiles and Calverley Grounds; 'nodes' that welcome and invite entry into a calm, safe, creative spaces beyond that feature distinctive art and water installations that befit a spa town.

Over many years the Town Forum has highlighted the need for improvements to the transport environment in its reports and consultation responses. Through making several changes to policy and behaviour the transport environment can be transformed as follows to achieve a

SAFE, CALM, CLEAN, HIGH QUALITY FUTURE FOR ALL MOVING THROUGHOUT OUR TOWN CENTRE.

1. **20 mph within the TCAP area 24 hours a day:** facilitates safer cycling environment, reduces carbon emissions/pollution. Extend the existing 20mph limits to cover the whole TCAP area.
2. **Pedestrian priority within the TCAP area:** enable safe road crossings phases at all traffic lights; voluntary or controlled crossings on roundabouts and junctions where there are none already despite high pedestrian need such as Carrs Corner, Vale Road/Station, Vale Road/London Road, Pantiles/Frant Rd/ Charles the Martyr, and London Road/Church Road.
3. **Pedestrian crossings at school gates and school streets:** focus on safe journeys to school on foot to reduce the school run; ban pavement parking. Extend 20mph along routes as needed.
4. **HGV width/weight restrictions:** throughout the TCAP area because of proximity on narrow pavements and roads on the historic street patterns such as Crescent Road, Church Road and Grove Hill Road. Limiting HGVs reduces pollution and danger to pedestrians and cyclists, but also protects vulnerable historic buildings from vibration damage - Crescent Road, Charles the Martyr, the Pantiles, Church Road, Inner London Road, etc
5. **LCWIPs to link residential areas and schools to the 'calm' 20mph town centre:** calm, safe road spaces with safe junctions and crossings should be at the core of the network. Walking routes with high quality surfaces, lighting and signage with convenient crossings and access to alleyways and shortcuts of which there are many.
6. **Greater awareness of an aging population:** all of the above plus pleasant places to sit to rest and enjoy the view or 'spa' history; encourage 'place making'; public and accessible toilets in every Quarter.
7. **A whole-town approach:** piecemeal 'improvements' must be changed to a whole town centre approach to providing solutions to the traffic issues described. Solutions to be of the same high quality design and workmanship across all 4 quarters.
8. **Centrally located bus interchange with bus stands well outside the TCAP zone where space is more available.** Demand a less polluting bus fleet and explore other school transport options with KCC. Encourage cheap fares and circular routes within the town.

9. **Revision of residents parking to recognise the priority of climate change, and pollution and carbon reduction.** Gradually limit multiple vehicle ownership by reducing residents passes in the town centre; reduce free on-street parking for non-residents; introduce MSCP parking benefits through free time/reduced costs, and inducement for residents to park in MSCPs instead of congesting residential roads; explore incentives for not owning a car.

Jane Fenwick, March 2024 Prepared by the Transport Working Group of the RTW Town Forum.