

**Response prepared by the Management Group of the Town Forum, to planning application 18/00076/Full**

***Introduction***

The Town Forum Management Group aims to limit its comments to the current planning application for the Theatre and Civic Complex. The proposed project provokes strongly held views both for and against the development. On the one hand, the Management Group of the Town Forum fully supports the Council's concept of Tunbridge Wells as a tourist destination and vibrant cultural centre for the High Weald. On the other, we are concerned about features of the project as it has been developed, and the conflict between the proposal and the Council's policies and adopted Local Plan.

***Environmental***

We acknowledge the efforts that have been made to reduce the impact of the theatre, but the loss of the green screen on the western boundary of the park remains of concern, and we have a problem with the bulk and design of the office building, and the impact on Calverley Grounds of the loss of mature trees and reshaping of the landform for the car-park.

***Traffic and Parking***

The proposals for the traffic and parking needs of the development have not been adequately developed. We believe the entry point for large vehicles, and their parking needs on site, will be more disruptive than is suggested, while the exit point for these vehicles is still unresolved. We are concerned that vehicle movements by HGVs, coaches and personal traffic would add to existing congestion in lower Mt Pleasant, and specific proposals are needed for (eg) station taxis and coaches serving the theatre to comply with the Council's aims for reducing congestion and pollution. Vehicles accessing the underground carpark on the scale proposed would interfere with the much needed improvements of Mt Pleasant, an important link in the north-south pedestrian route.

While the new development will result both in loss of existing parking and the need for extra parking spaces, the possibility of alternative parking arrangements does not appear to have been considered. Given that a report has been commissioned into Park & Ride, the impact of this on traffic movements into the town centre, and the use of alternative sites such as Torrington MSCP, should be evaluated before committing to the new car park of this size. We believe that alternative sites for carparking are possible, with similar access to the theatre and to the businesses in Mt Pleasant.

***Existing Civic complex***

We remain concerned that by embracing this project without concurrently agreed long-term plans the Council is placing at risk the future of the existing Civic Complex, a major physical

---

Formed in 2005, the Town Forum is the voice of 50,000 residents in the unparished area of Royal Tunbridge Wells on issues of common interest

---

**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)

asset comprising nationally important Listed Buildings, in respect of which the Council has a duty of care both as owner, occupier and planning authority.

### ***Impact on Calverley Grounds***

We also believe the impact of the underground car park, the proposed landscaping and future of Calverley Grounds have not been properly considered and that a strategy for the future of the whole of Calverley Grounds comprising (eg) uses, lighting, facilities and pedestrian movement, should be brought forward concurrently with this application.

### ***Conclusion***

The Town Forum is a place where a range of ideas and views are openly discussed and, on this issue, opinions are split. The Management Group supports the Council's ambition but has significant concerns about the application in its present form, combining disparate elements with very wide implications and without clear plans for traffic impact, for the existing Civic Centre, for Calverley Grounds, or for Mt Pleasant. We cannot fully support the application with this degree of uncertainty in the parking, traffic and pollution issues and suggest that the Planning Committee defers the application to enable these issues to be resolved, by for example:

- Drastically reducing the underground carpark:
  - Reduces project and financial risk – simpler, lower cost (£15m saving), reduces spoil removal by ca. 2/3;
  - Preserves landscape of Calverley Grounds by saving mature trees and eliminating the drastic remodelling of the north western corner; and
  - Mitigates the impact of additional traffic on Mount Pleasant.
- Providing alternative parking by a direct link to Torrington and/or additional parking elsewhere
- Integrating the proposals with full plans for reuse of the existing Civic Centre and for Calverley Grounds
- Modifying the massing and design of the offices to respect local character and minimise impact on the wider arcadian context.

Adrian Berendt

Chair, Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum