

## **Draft Strategic Plan 2008-11**

The Executive of the Civic Society considered the above at its meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January. The Society welcomes the attempt to set detailed objectives and measure outcomes for the Council's work, and to update this on an annual basis.

But we have some serious reservations about the present document. There is no explanation of how far the Plan is constrained by the Government's Performance Management Framework, and in the absence of this we can only comment on the document as it stands.

1. This is a public consultation exercise, and for this purpose the document is far too long and desperately needs text editing, a glossary of terms and removal of duplication. We feel no lay person is likely to read the whole thoroughly enough to make sensible comments on it.
2. It contains a strain of self-congratulation, repeatedly telling us that TWBC has a top-quartile level of public approval. In fact figures in the report show public approval has fallen since 2000/01. It does not describe any of the current crises affecting TW such as traffic, youth crime, maintenance of the public realm etc, except in some cases to say how they are improving.
3. The Plan refers to `services` being provided to `customers` through a plethora of (largely unexplained) working bodies. The Council does provide services, and service delivery can be measured in a way that policy choices cannot. But to reduce all activities to `services` has the effect of hiding the policy options from view. What we need to know is not just how the Council will do x, but what they will do when faced with a choice between x, y and z.

In summary we feel the document is more designed to justify the Council's level of activity than to enable the public to make informed comment on its objectives and outcomes.

On matters which are the particular concern of the Society, the first (economic) Priority contains no reference to constraints or opportunities inherent in the unique environmental heritage of TW (not even tourism). We fear this could mean that where economic criteria conflict with environmental ones, the commercial economy will prevail. The summary of Corporate Objectives in Appendix A does not refer to the historic heritage or landscape at all, and in general we don't find a sense that Tunbridge Wells is a special place requiring original solutions.

Under Priority 2 Care for our Environment the Council commits itself to protect listed buildings and conservation areas. This general approach would be more substantial if there were proposals, for example, to adopt specific conservation area policies or make Article 4 directions. We note that new conservation area surveys have been carried out but we don't find any result of these in the Plan.

We welcome the proposal to adopt protocols for the Council's work with KCC to improve highways and footpaths and care for the street scene, but again we would be glad to know more about methods and standards in this vexed area. We did not find any specific reference to the maintenance of highway surfaces, signs and lighting.

Finally we note that traffic flows in Tunbridge Wells are twice the national average, and would have expected to find proposals for dealing with the related problems of traffic and parking.