

Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Development Framework Town Centres Area Action Plan DPD & Allocations DPD

Engagement 2: 14 June to 30 August 2010

QUESTIONNAIRE ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Q1 Do you consider that Royal Tunbridge Wells has any further development needs that should be added to the list (which you will find on pages 3-4 of the RTW consultation pack), or, conversely, that any identified needs are incorrect and should be removed from the list? Please specify and provide evidence to support your answer in the comments box.

The housing figure quoted is irrelevant following the abandonment of the regional targets and should be replaced by one based on locally assessed needs.

The Employment Land Study finding is out of date: maintaining office employment will require an increase in office floorspace, and the replacement of older purpose-built offices by new stock.

The increase proposed in retail floorspace is wildly unrealistic and seems rooted in pre-financial melt-down thinking. The nation, including Tun Wells, must live more sustainably in every sense. The essential retail needs of the more local community should be planned for, not extravagant shopping in pointless competition with shops in other centres.

Retail Shopping League Tables should be disregarded. Any significant increase in retail activity is anyway undesirable as this would increase traffic congestion and the need for parking, (although this could deter any increase in trade!)

Far more is involved in quality of life for Tunbridge Wells residents than more and more shopping choice, (more certainly in the more sustainable future) The extra shops are likely to be in a chain so their profits would go far away from TW – leaving only the benefit of some more shop assistant jobs.

Proposals for leisure, culture and community facilities should include as a key feature the retention and enhancement of the Town Hall complex and cultural centre in its present location which is a prime asset of Tunbridge Wells.

Q2 If you feel strongly about the boundary now proposed and wish to comment further, please do so in the comments box below.

The value of the town centre definition is only to guide decisions on the location of `town centre uses`. The area is so large and diverse and the uses quoted are so wide-ranging that the significance of the boundary seems limited.

Q3 Do you think that Calverley Grounds should be included within the town centre boundary as an integral part of Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre?

All depends on what function the boundary serves. The Calverley Grounds is an essential park in the centre of town which is recognised as such if it is retained within the boundary, although no other town centre uses would be appropriate for Calverley Grounds which should remain as a public park..

Q4 Have the main issues for Royal Tunbridge Wells and the town centre been identified correctly? Yes/No. If No please use the comments box to explain what other issues you feel should be addressed.

No. The list on p7 includes items which are not issues; some are statements of fact without clear policy implication; some are ambiguous ('linking green space'). To be an effective list it would require a smaller number of objectives with an indication of priorities and connections between them.

Q5 Do you agree with the defined town quarters which are identified on Map TW04 in the RTW consultation pack? Yes/No. Please comment and/or specify how they could be amended.

Difficult to answer Yes/No.

Out of the seven labels, five are location names and two Business Quarter and Retail Quarters denote primary activity. But "Camden Rd" is equally a primary activity Retail Quarter – and what about the Pantiles and the High Street? The "Business Quarter" with the unlabelled area to the north is largely residential. Should not therefore an appropriate area be labelled "Residential Quarter" – but note Mt Ephraim Rd is high quality Business!

Q6 Do you think any of these quarters need particular improvement? Yes/No. Please specify which quarter(s) need(s) improvement and why.

Yes - but all do in parts; and it is inappropriate to make a league table of areas in need of improvement. But there are many places/buildings/areas in the town centre requiring improvement or redevelopment, eg. the offices around Vale Avenue, the Cinema site and the west side of Mt Pleasant, and the Torrington (Fort Knox) Car Park

Q7 What are your views on the current parking provision in RTW? Please give your views and make any additional comments in the box.

The on-street car parking situation has been diabolic for years; and has been spreading outwards from the centre for years. Real positive action is needed to provide off-street parking for all day parkers (commuters) (Rusthall streets now are more clogged up because of commuters who then use the bus service!) The roads on the Common are disfigured with parked cars and so on. Yet the Council has offered at least two (if not all) its town centre public car parks for "development" by the TW Regen Co. This should be sensibly reconsidered. The contentious call for a massive increase in Retail provision would require a commensurate increase in parking provision to get any increase in actual trade, but where is this extra parking planned to be?

Q8 Do you think park and ride would be well used if this was introduced in Royal Tunbridge Wells? Yes/No.

Yes; it could be but only if well planned and high congestion still remains in town centre. Suitable sites are limited and not all are in optimum positions.

Better results could be obtained by Park & Rail if the railway is restored from Tunbridge Wells (Central) to Tunbridge Wells West and on to reconnect with the Uckfield Line at Eridge. (Sainsburys is not a bar – I can give details) Already 200 commuter cars park around Eridge Station – this could be doubled and likewise appropriately increased at Ashurst, Bells Yew Green, Wadhurst, Crowborough, Buxted and Uckfield.

Q9 Where do you think a park and ride scheme(s) would be best located? Please specify or make any additional comments you may have in the box provided.

The following sites have been considered on and off for many years -

. Frant Road (off St Marks Rd), Langton Green (near Water Tower), Knights Park. Pembury (Tesco's – offer of 300). Mabledon.

But they all present problems. This why Park & Rail (Q8 response) should be seriously considered and even sites further out, such as Belting.

Very serious consideration should be given to providing commuter parking on an upper deck over part of the huge Sainsbury surface car park as has been done successfully at Lewes by a low-cost construction technique by a local (Uckfield) firm or by a versatile construction (used by Tesco's) which can be extended or removed as desired. Commuters coming into TW by car to work would be able to park on the upper deck and then go on by the Shopper Hopper frequent bus service and not need to clog up the streets.

In general, Park & Ride sites need to be big enough to be properly designed and managed, with reliable public transport etc. It is therefore debatable whether Park & Ride can be cost effective if cars using the parks would leave room in the town centre for others to fill!

Q10 What other transport and/or road improvements do you think could be made to ease congestion in Royal Tunbridge Wells? Please give details in the comments box.

There is a crying need to reduce the traffic congestion around and through Longfield Road.

The diverse development of the so-called Industrial Estate into something very different has serious consequences for the viability of the town centre. How can there sensibly be a call for more retail floorspace in the town centre when planning permission has been given for a massive increase in retail activity on the so-called Industrial Estate?

Pursue reopening the rail-link to the West Station with scheduled services through to Eridge and on both ways to either Uckfield or to Hurst Green and on to London. Car parking for commuters at the TW Central Sta is limited and road congestion causes problems. But opening the West Sta with an upper deck car park beside it, (re Q9 above) could greatly ease the situation.

TWBC should enthusiastically support the initiatives in Sussex to reconnect Uckfield to Lewes and to both Brighton and Eastbourne direct. People in Sussex want to come into TW (and Tonbridge) and do so in large numbers. The population of the Crowborough-Uckfield area is rising fast and approaching 40,000. TW would benefit increasingly from a rail connection to this area, and would be more important to TW than the rail connection to more remote Hastings in a different orbit. (I could expand greatly if any interest.)

Investigate use of shared space in town centre (but do consult Ashford and the DTp on the crippling cost of "accident" claims resulting from the wall to wall shared space – nowhere safe for pedestrians, esp. those handicapped)

Very serious consideration should be given to introducing a 20mph speed limit in the town centre – the length of Mt Pleasant and the High Street (which could 15mph), Munson Rd, and Calverley Rd (to Carrs Corner), Camden Rd etc. This could bring about an entirely different attitude and a more relaxed and safer atmosphere for all types of highway users and residents. 20mph speed limits have benefited, even transformed, East Grinstead and Lewes, Sevenoaks, Cranbrook and Maidstone locally, and many other places throughout the country – why does RTW have to wait so long to benefit when it costs so little to install?

An effective taxi-rank (for at least 6, pref 8) should be provided at the Millennium Square, which can be clearly seen from the Precinct and RVP Entrance. Access should be provided across the very little used edge of the Square, between the Clock and Currys, strictly for taxis and emergency vehicles only, so they can access Mt Pleasant and help make the stand more useful and successful.

The bus Gate is not a problem; it operates well with pedestrians given real priority. I have made frequent observations. There is a big reduction in traffic after 10am so buses etc become the main users and strict enforcement would not be helpful as the displaced traffic would simply swell the traffic in Munson & Camden Rds and in Mt Ephraim. The traffic ban would be more benefit in the evenings after 7pm when there is very little public transport and people are relaxed and enjoying themselves. (I could discuss if any interest)

Q11 Do you think the town is adequately linked to the surrounding residential areas through good and well-managed public footpaths and cycle routes? Yes/No. Please make any additional comments in the box provided.

Question is not clear - does it refer to the town centre? There are problems from the incompleteness of the cycle network and the fact that most footpaths adjoin busy roads. What makes a footpath "well managed"? The improved links referred to on p7 are not shown on the maps.

Cycle routes need to be off-road. Cycling on a road with traffic is dangerous, unhealthy, dangerous and unpleasant - and more cyclists on main roads could seriously increase traffic congestion. What is needed is off-road cycleways. Conrad Froud and I have given detailed presentations which I believe have been appreciated by Deb Dixon & Alison Ruff. I think the Pembury Rd cycleway/footway has been a success and the long planned cycleway from Goods Sta Rd through to the Industrial Estate should be pursued to completion.

I have made suggestions for improving this and for extending it via Barnetts Wood and lower Powdermill Lane to Vauxhall Lane and on to Tonbridge. This would further the Tonb-TunW Regional Hub concept! (I could provide details if any interest)

Cycling has been permitted on a path through Hilberts and should be permitted on selected paths through the Common and parks (e.g. the Tarry Path across Rusthall Common, Still Green, and on the west side of the main path through The Grove. (I could make more suggestions)

Q12 Do you think the pedestrian crossings are adequate within and around the town? Yes/No. If you answered `no` where do you think improvements could be made?

No. Carrs Corner. London Road at Vale Road. Vale Road at High Street. Eridge Road at K Charles Ch. Frant Road at Pantiles/Union House.

Roundabouts are being advocated to improve traffic flow – but they impede pedestrians, NB Carrs Corner.

Q13 Do you think the town could benefit from any public space improvements (for example better and/or more seating, signage etc.)? Yes/No. Please specify.

Yes. Major redesign needed at Fiveways/Upper Mt Pleasant with paving, signage, lighting, street furniture, reduced utility equipment at street level. Replace tarmac pavement `repairs` in Mt Pleasant. Remove non-functional barriers. Site litter bins beside seats.

Q14 Do you think there are enough shops in the town centre? Yes/No. If you answered `no`, what type of shops would you like to see more of (for example, department stores, specialist shops)?

Yes. Some increase in shops acceptable to improve retail offer especially of essential goods, and to support necessary redevelopment, but caution needed to avoid undermining specialist and independent retailers who give RTW its character. Possibility of department store on Cinema site. No case for major increases until future of economy (and eg. online retailing) is clear. No case for major new shopping complex on Town Hall site.

Q15 Would you like to see more cafes and/or restaurants in the Town Centre? Yes/No. If you answered `yes` where would you like to see them?

Doubtful Yes/No. Suggest only when proven need. Some increase acceptable subject to strict criteria on design, location and management, in view of mixed nature of town centre, especially where late hours are involved. Town centre housing is badly affected by noise, traffic, litter, vandalism etc.

Q16 Do you think there should be more offices in the town centre? Yes/No. If you answered `yes` where do you think these should be located?

Yes. Some increase acceptable as part of a strategy to increase employment especially with minimum travel, redevelop or upgrade older office blocks, and bring former residential property back into residential use in suitable cases. New major office development should only be considered on a limited number of sites, and be required to respect the existing fabric. No case for major office development on Town Hall site, there are plenty of alternative locations. Office space for others would be taken up by the relocate Council accommodation! (Gateway now occupies space suitable for retail, restaurant, or other office use.)

Q17 Do you think there should be more residential development within the town centre, or should it mostly be located on the outskirts of the town?

There is already considerable housing within the defined town centre, and with such a diffuse centre there is probably scope for more, but existing town centre residents have various problems. In general the town centre is not suitable for all sorts of housing, and any housing provided should be carefully considered in terms of design and location.

Q18 What do you think should be the priority for the Longfield Road/North Farm area? Examples are: better transport links; more industrial and/or business uses, etc. Please specify where.

Resolve internal traffic problems; improve links to A21, A26 and town centre; restrict retail uses to those requiring an off-centre location. Encourage (light) Industry by preserving sites for it.

Q19 Parks and areas of woodland can provide different functions and are often used in different ways. Do you use your local park and/or visit local woodland? Yes/No. If yes, which park or woodland do you use and for what reason do you visit? If no, please state which is your local park and/or woodland (if known) and give reasons why you do not use these areas.

Yes. The Farmcombe Open Space frequently. Grove, Dunorlan, the Common occasionally. I have visited all parks for exercise, fresh air and contact with nature. I think our parks are a glorious asset for TW, and long may they be so.

Q20 Do you think there are any areas of Royal Tunbridge Wells that are lacking in public open green spaces? If so, please specify.'

Not aware of any worth mentioning.

Q21 Do you think there should be more street trees and planting around the town? please specify any areas that you think could benefit.

In general, street trees and plantings improves the environment, but they need to be maintained and trimmed. Local residents should be encouraged to help.

Q22 Do you agree with the process by which the Borough Council has filtered out those sites that either do not need to be allocated by virtue of their size; or should not be allocated because they are unsuitable for development?

Although this process may be required, the effect is to leave a very large number of development sites for consideration, including some which overlap or duplicate.

Q23 Do you wish to make any comments about a specific site? If so, please write the site reference number and your comments in the box provided. Please comment in particular on the uses it is considered to be suitable for.

There appear to be 4-5 `sites` affecting part or all of the Town Hall complex (134, 137, 178, 1012). These are listed buildings in good condition, purpose-built for their present role and ideally located. There is no basis for treating them as suitable for, let alone available for, redevelopment. The proposed uses are a very wide range and similar or identical to that proposed for elsewhere in the town, or for many other town centre sites. The consultation does not make it clear that displacing the Town Hall etc for commercial activity is envisaged, but this appears from the context, and from the other sites with similar designations. This would be wholly unacceptable, and it is disturbing that the consultation does not make the intention (or anything else) clear to enable the public to respond.

Q24 Do you think there are particular sites and/or areas that are not suitable for future development? Please specify and say why they are not suitable.

With the exception of the above, I accept that the sites listed should appear in the list, provided redevelopment takes account of the presence of buildings or features on the site, especially where these are statutorily listed, or in other ways perform a useful function. In many cases I feel comprehensive redevelopment would not be reasonable or practical, and much more sensitive and small-scale renewal would be necessary.

Q25 Do you wish to submit any further sites for consideration for allocation in either the Town Centre Area Action Plan or Allocations DPD? Yes/No (completed Site Submission Form attached).

No.

Q26 It may be necessary for the Borough Council to identify additional sites to meet the Borough's development needs. Are there any areas of Royal Tunbridge Wells that you think should not accommodate any further development of a particular type? Please be specific about your reasons.

There should be no commitments of peripheral land until the needs described on p7 of the consultation pack have been reassessed. In relation to the town centre we believe the emphasis falls by implication on major development/redevelopment which is no longer appropriate or likely to be viable.

Q27 If you have additional comments about Royal Tunbridge Wells that you consider the Borough Council should take into account when preparing the Town Centres Area Action Plan DPD and/or Allocations DPD, please make them in the comments box below.

Yes. It should be made absolutely clear that the Town Hall and all the Civic/Cultural Centre is a highly valued asset of the town, and necessary for Tunbridge Wells to justify its designation as a Regional Hub, and for people "to love where they live".

So preceding the bewildering list of possible uses of the Civic Centre, it should be made clear in the TCAAP that they would have to clearly demonstrate that they would provide all the present amenities for the community in an improved way, and preferably be an improvement over feasible enhancements and modernisations (some already planned) for the present buildings.

Put succinctly, there should be properly considered "planning gain". This would mean that any replacement would have to demonstrate that any displaced facility can and will be adequately provided at an acceptable and specified location elsewhere.

There is enormous public concern that these prime amenities are regarded by the Council as expendable and removable; this should be clearly dispelled in any TCAAPlan..

John V Goodfellow.

**Town Forum representative for the Banner Farm Residents Association
Committee member Banner Farm Residents Association**

29 Aug 2010.

P.S.

Plan TW/09 TunW Green Infrastructure Assets.

I have previously expressed concern that the Julian Hewett Field off Cavendish Drive is shown as a private green space and not as a public space maintained by TWBC.
Also that the Nevill Cricket Ground and RTW Tennis Club, Warwick Park, two of the most "important open spaces" in the whole town are shown as blanks, whereas the contiguous Rifle Range area is. I would be grateful for definitive responses on these points.

Hawkenbury Neighbourhood Centre.

I have not drawn attention to this local Centre for most (at least) of the Banner Farm area and of course the Hawkenbury Village Assoc area, perhaps a 1000 people in all.
This centre has been neglected for many decades, in spite of enormously increased traffic through this centre coming from Bayhall Rd, Halls Hole Rd and Forest Rd.
Also the Village Green planned for a corner of the Land Registry site sadly did not materialise, but is still easily realisable and should be part of the active consideration for re-development of the site now underway by TWBC.

I am not sure whether consideration of the Hawkenbury area is encompassed by the resent consultation; would you please kindly advise as to how I should make a more detailed comment.