

# 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

### *Comments on and response to TCAAP questionnaire:*

Overall the consultation pack is clear and well constructed and I wholeheartedly agree with the vision articulated on page 2. Specific comments are:

- the development needs are generally fine save that:
  - they omit any reference to education, particularly the tertiary sector;
  - green infra structure is referenced but not developed at all;
  - retail space - TW is increasingly unusual in not being merely a soulless retail driven town centre and we need to ensure that this remains the case. Senseless, and cheap, retail expansion will ironically destroy the town's attractions in the medium term and be counterproductive;
  - office space - as long as driven by demand and it is both landscape enhancing (look at Zaha Hadid's work in Barcelona for examples) and environmentally friendly.
- happy with the town centre boundary and the "quarters" though on the latter they clearly are only rough representations - all areas of the town need particular improvements, obviously, even if you look only to the streetscape and the built environment.
- TW issues - these are fine as far as they go but they don't address educational issues and they appear to prioritise cars over pedestrians and public transport. Really we should be looking to keep cars out of the town centre and that is highly relevant to the question of parking; there seems to me to be more than enough in central TW so long as it is a clear objective to reduce car traffic in the town. On this point I suspect sadly that park and ride will be insufficient in and of itself and will require incentivisation, the most obvious option being a rates rebate for businesses which facilitate greener travel alternatives for their staff.
- transport improvements - yes park and ride and integrated public transport as well as enabling genuine routes for cyclists and pedestrians, including decent crossings around schools. An interesting example of the current rather ill thought out system is that it currently isn't even possible to get back from the out of town (ridiculous concept for a town entertainment facility) on the bus in the evenings. But do please look at the Town Forum transport paper produced some four years ago under the leadership of June Bridgeman which offered a number of cheap and sensible solutions on this issue.

- public space improvements - Daniel Bech campaigned very vigorously on street signage and similar and it would be a fitting tribute to improve these but equally we should look to increase street trees and planting; the Transition Towns initiative outside the library this year and the return of TW in Bloom have been significant positive contributors to the town environment.
- shops - the big danger is turning TW centre into a soulless identikit high street which slowly strangles the town; some retail development, but high quality, beautiful and environmentally friendly is more than fine.
- cafes and restaurants - reputedly there are more than 50 outlets providing coffee within 500 yards of the main line station; how can the town need more and why should TWBC play a role in encouraging more?
- specific sites - number 1012 appears to be the Town Hall complex; frankly I don't really have a problem with developing the area in a sympathetic way but that must include - if only to fit with the vision articulated in this very document - a theatre, library and museum and high quality retail. The other big issue with this is that stalled development will create another eye sore like the old cinema site and in fact working these two major sites at the same time will be horribly (and unnecessarily) disruptive for the town. Please note also that the sites in Hawkenbury are currently both rather lovely and also well used recreational areas - please don't sanction ill thought through housing or office areas which deprive residents of these green amenities and in particular please ensure that the accompanying infrastructure (schools, doctors, as well as sewers and roads) is built in tandem with any development.

In summary the key points for me arising from this framework and questionnaire are that:

1. all development should be prioritised for brownfield sites;
2. the town centre should be developed to be pedestrian friendly and the public transport system should be fully integrated;
3. the unusually interesting town centre should be retained and enhanced ensuring that all new build or refurbishments, whether residential, retail or office space, are beautiful and environmentally friendly, the latter if necessary through enforced planning conditions;
4. infrastructure should accompany development;
5. we are not doing enough to improve the educational opportunities in the town - it is a personal hobby horse but I would like to see a university, preferably technology based, in the town centre; and critically
6. it is the eclectic mixed use of TW with its central amenities that make the town interesting and a place that we love to live. We must be careful with it.

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