



24th February 2008

Nick Green
Community Development Officer
Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells
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Dear Nick

Tunbridge Wells Borough Youth Strategy

Please find below comments in relation to the above strategy. I am delighted to see such a strategy evolving and welcome any movement towards proper inclusion of the youth in decision making for the future. If you give them no power to determine their future then you will undermine an entire generation.

I have now taken time to read the **Overview (Part 1) and Making it Happen (Part 2) documents.**

Each document was easy to follow and outlined quite clearly the background and aspirations. In the first instance I would comment that I do sincerely trust that it is not just recent research which has flagged this obvious and ongoing concern. You should be aware that I have made various comments in Town Forum meetings about the total lack of appropriate Youth facilities within the unparished area of Royal Tunbridge Wells, which unfortunately is replicated throughout the borough.

As at least 48% of young people with the borough of Tunbridge Wells live within the urban areas of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough then it is of paramount importance that any activity in the "Master Plan" of Royal Tunbridge Wells must take this fact into account. As it is also the case that many more 16-24 year olds will be within this area within the next 15 years then it must be all too obvious to see that more attention must be given to these age groups.

Whereas this strategy acknowledges and addresses the key issues and priorities for young people in the borough the question must be asked does it go all the way? These consultation papers have been based upon the sum total of 570 young people across the borough. You will understand what my next questions will be. From what backgrounds are these children? Can they read? Do they have numeracy standards? Are they from broken homes? What is the split of those children asked both within the urban area of Royal Tunbridge Wells/Southborough and other areas? I trust you will understand my questioning of the findings and whether they truly represent an adequate cross-section of our younger community.

The Aims of the Strategy are clear, however you must make it clearer that life requires an element of self-help. I applaud each of these aims, but you must ensure that ALL youth are equipped with life skills. There is too much illiteracy and lack of numeracy within the Royal Tunbridge Wells area and this must be addressed as part of any strategy, which I assume will be covered under education links, although there must be a fail-safe mechanism to catch those who drop through the net. I do not find this clearly stated. Without basic reading and numeracy skills what you may have to offer will fall on "deaf ears". You must ensure that additional support is provided to those children who actually need it.

The national context cannot be argued, but one does assume that if one is to live a healthy lifestyle then one can reach sports clubs easily and also eat healthily. They say to eat at least five fruit/vegetables a day, but can you afford this basic on a low income when food becomes more expensive as the years go by and we have a lack of competition for supermarkets in Royal Tunbridge Wells. Tesco over-shopped and Sainsbury at the far end and unable to reach in one bus journey from Southborough.

Under Local Context I note reference to Local Children's Trust Action Plans it would be useful to have these named in an index, as this would show people who was actually doing the work.

You are aware already that I do dislike the word "Play" in the title Tunbridge Wells Play Strategy, as it can be seen as derisive. Indeed you can play on swings and play a game of football, but I do not regard a Youth Centre as a place to play, rather a place to socialise.

The Leisure Strategy 2006-2012 should also include an objective to provide "Meeting Places". Currently, Royal Tunbridge Wells does not even have a Village Hall. This time scale is also too short when in 15 years you will see an increase in the 16-24 year age range.

The Housing Strategy 2006-2011 seems also not to have a long enough period to plan for. It should show a clear priority to provide support for families affected by domestic upset through divorce/abuse within the household/parents being sent to prison leaving grandparents to cope.

I have already mentioned the number of those consulted, which I believe is inadequate for such an important issue. Under Key Issues and Concerns it concludes "Most young people generally feel safe". How many? Under "Being Healthy" a major concern is raised by the majority – lack of facilities for undertaking exercise. This is serious when you have only consulted 570 people!

The final concern quoted surrounds "Having a say." Unfortunately, the youth are not the only residents within Royal Tunbridge Wells who have felt they were not listened to. The Urban and Rural Youth Forums are a good start, but they are not the full answer. You must give Youth an involvement in putting together initiatives and being valued as part of the community. Give youth responsibility and let them get to understand what it means to have your place vandalised. They will soon sort this out phenomenon out if they are given the opportunity to create initiatives.

Making it Happen

The initial paragraph has the most odious phrase "as far as is possible". What do you mean?

Indeed there should be more leisure facilities in the areas of Sherwood, Ramslye, Rusthall etc, but what type of facility. If we had any form of decent public transport, which ran at sensible times, then specific facilities could be provided in various parts of Royal Tunbridge Wells that ALL youth could get to. Currently our public transport (albeit in private hands) is lamentable. No profit then no service is the motto! What is the Council going to do?

It is noted that Sports and Leisure facilities can be found at xyz place and this is not disputed, but I do think that if you wish to talk about private sports clubs then please remember and ask where the huge membership fee comes from. Again, if you refer to the previous comment upon public transport then it is rather farcical to refer to Knights Park, Maidstone, Larkfield and Tenterden.

I am delighted to see that Art and Culture is mentioned, but I do hope that high on the agenda is for the Council to look at how they can promote the art that their own youth are producing. I am sure we have budding artists, but do we have a yearly art festival where our youth can show off their art forms from sculpture to painting?

I must agree with all of what is said under "What do we need to do?" but you must make sure there is full information on the internet and elsewhere showing where all facilities are and how they can be reached. Currently there is little promotion of facilities and by way of example you can hardly read the Grosvenor Rec' sign from the bridge after Quarry Road. I do not believe there is a single concise database of where anything is.

If you manage to achieve a joined up approach to facilities then you will make it easier for ALL youth to gain access. Currently, facilities seem to be isolated, which in the main is due to dreadful public transport.

It is true that a group of teenagers hanging around looking menacing is of concern to the youth, but also to all other age groups. However, if you organise a joined-up approach towards facilities and public transport you will eradicate most of the boredom, which prevails in the youth of today. The sorry fact is that there is a total lacking in appropriate facilities of the youth who cause those problems and in 15 years there will be even more of that age range so the question must be asked what is going to be done to plan for this, as this strategy is too short a term? It lasts three years and simply delays the inevitable.

Whereas it is said in the Overview that the majority of youth referred to a lack of facilities for undertaking exercise it is then stated that a majority of young people feel they lead healthy lifestyles and feel healthy. Is this not a contradiction in terms? I am glad that you have put in a caveat about national trends and I therefore suspect the consultation process may be flawed as only 570 young people were consulted. I am sure that if you consulted Showfields or Sherwood in isolation against St John's, as an example, you would find a totally different return on questions asked.

Once again, I am particularly concerned that young people have made specific reference to "home life" under Being Healthy. I believe this aspect is not being explained fully, as it could range from passive smoking to mental unease due to abuse within the house. I do not feel this is adequately explained or being appropriately addressed.

The most important activity that the Council needs to do is to work with partners to improve provision of sports and exercise facilities for young people, this should not be the last item listed.

I believe the information and advice being given to the youth is very good, but the Council must put together a concise directory of where all facilities can be found and how to reach them, as stated above already, but in any endeavour of this nature it must be inclusive and be aware that many do not have internet access, as the libraries can only service so many. Furthermore, many cannot read well enough and it is these very people who must be supported and steered towards full ability.

As you (Nick Green) know the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum made contact with the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and requested direct contact with the Urban Youth Forum. I am glad to see that we shall soon meet and look forward to proper engagement in due course. It is unfortunate, however, that this was our own initiative rather than that of the Council. Therein lies a concern, exactly how are you communicating your message to all organisations and all youth across the borough.

Finally, I note references made to continuing research into improving provision of sports and exercise facilities for young people by working with the Tunbridge Wells Play Partnership and Extended Schools programme, but I must ask where has all of the Section 106 spend gone. Exactly how much money has gone into TWGGS/TWBGS/St Paul's Infant School providing Educational Facilities as against the areas from where those Section 106 monies came from? What part of those facilities can all Youth in Royal Tunbridge Wells use? Vast sums have gone into Education, but little, it appears, on Sport and Leisure. Perhaps this Strategy and promise to involve the Youth in determining their future will put an end to this dubious allocation process under Section 106. Section 106 spend was not meant to subsidise KCC for their own desires.

The above only looks at Royal Tunbridge Wells area and does not look at other areas outside nor does it look at each aspect in-depth as these would have already been looked at under various other papers such as Vision for Kent.

In summary, the strategy must be commended and I look forward to seeing the result of this consultation.

Yours sincerely

Chris Thomas
Chairman
Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

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