



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 24 June 2010

Present: Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association), Maggie Fraser (Tunbridge Wells Over Fifties' Forum), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Peter Perry (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Christopher Thomas (The Chairman of the Town Forum and The Goodwins No's 1 & 2 Residents' Company/Woodbury Close Residents' Association), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association and Chair of Sherborne Close), Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Ian Naismith (Hanover & Rock Villa Association), John Hodge (Beula Road Resident's Association), Chris Woodward (Federation of Small Businesses, Tunbridge Wells), Betsey Dix, (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), June Bridgeman (Soroptimists), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Association), Alastair Tod (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Alison Finlay (Inner London Road Residents Association)

RTW Ward Councillors: Mrs Catherine Mayhew (Park), Ronen Basu (Culverden), Peter Crawford (Broadwater), Lesley Herriot (St John's & Skinners 6 Roads Residents Association) and Frank Williams (Sherwood), David Neve (St James), Peter Bulman (Park), Len Price (Culverden), Catherine Mayhew (Park), James Scholes (Pantiles & St Marks),

Others in attendance: Cllrs Roy Bullock (Leader of the Council), Brian Ransley (Capel & resident in St John's) Bill Hills (Paddock Wood East); Mary Harris (Courier) Linda Chamberlain (Citizens Advice Bureau TW & District), and Sue French (Committee Administrator), Helen Featherstone (Observer), Judith Waters (Observer), Patrick Moran (Observer), Katrina Gilman (Observer), David Sandford (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society)

Apologies:

John Cunningham, (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society) Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association), John Higgs, Victor Bethell (Skinners 6 Roads Residents Association)

(Christopher Thomas in the Chair for the duration of the meeting.)

Dr Daniel Bech – Christopher Thomas spoke of the sad loss of Dr Daniel Bech who died suddenly the week before. He spoke of Daniel's outstanding contribution to the Town Forum, his determination to rid the town of 'grot spots' to make Royal Tunbridge Wells a better place. Christopher Thomas asked for a minute silence from the Town Forum for a man who was 'a shining, leading light' and will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

Membership Changes

New members –

Councillor Lesley Herriot has temporarily replaced Mr Victor Bethell as Acting Chair of Skinners 6 Roads Residents Association

Christopher Thomas welcomed new member Linda Chamberlain of CAB, Tunbridge Wells & District.

Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 27 May 2010

Christopher Thomas apologised for the late distribution of the minutes, Graham Goddard, Hospital Development Director, Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells was producing a statement for the minutes which was subsequently delayed.

Matters Arising:

Mr John Cunningham was present at the meeting of 27 May 2010 but was not noted on the attendance list.

Councillor Bulman attended the meeting of 27 May 2010 but was not on the attendance list.

Previous Minutes

The minutes were agreed.

On-going Action

Action Outstanding from meeting of 26 November 2009

Graham Goddard to make contact again with the Ambulance Service with a view to inviting a spokesperson to the next meeting.

Actions Outstanding from the Meeting dated 25 February 2010

Councillor Mayhew referred to Councillor Williams' post-meeting email from 27 May 2010 regarding boundary issues in Meadow Road, she is still awaiting clarification as to where the legal boundary of TWBC lay and will inform the Town Forum when she receives the information.

Actions outstanding from meeting of 27 May 2010

Action: Graham Goddard to find out if the hospital is to be named 'Acute' or General.
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Action: Graham Goddard to investigate whereabouts of neurological unit in new hospital.
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Action: Debbie Stock, Strategic Commissioning Manager for West Kent PCT to look at possible sourcing/funding to encourage more interest in training up specialists for the Tunbridge Wells area – still awaiting a reply.
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Action: That Alan Hewitt reports back to the Town Forum updates on bus provision for the new hospital
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4. Reports from Councillors

Councillor Basu updated the Town Forum regarding 'Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom'. The Pantiles and town centre now have all hanging baskets where they should be. There were also various tiered containers in the precinct. Councillor Basu gave his grateful thanks to Daniel Bech for all of his assistance and support and announced that the name 'Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom' would be staying.

Councillor Williams reminded Town Forum Members that the Mela is on Sunday 18th July from midday onwards, free admission and all are welcome at the Calverley Grounds. The Museum is running a concurrent display on the upper field again (i.e. on the old Bowling Green).

Christopher Thomas mentioned that the 'Finals Night Concert' at the Assembly Hall is on Sunday 18 July at 6.30pm. Tickets cost £12, Concessions cost £10. Contact Box Office on 01892-530613/532072.

The Future of the Town Hall

Dr Philip Whitbourn and Mr David Sandford presented a 10 minute introduction on the history, architecture and general background of the future of the town hall and civic centre complex.

Christopher Thomas thanked Dr Whitbourn and David Sandford and then opened the discussion after the presentation with a letter from the Club President of Soroptomist, Mrs Helen Bouch which was distributed to the Town Forum. The letter expressed the organisation's concerns about proposals to remove the Town Hall from its present site.

Mr John Goodfellow announced he had emailed Chief Executive, William Benson his views and asked him to make public any reports regarding the modernisation and future use of the Town Hall.

Councillor Neve asked if the Town Hall is just too big for the staff still employed in there now we have a Gateway? Couldn't the local PCT and other outside agencies move in? The Cinema and Town Hall are in the middle of town, why re-locate the Town Hall to Hawkenbury?

The Cinema and Town Hall could all be redeveloped. Where would the Museum and library be located if the Town Hall is re-located? This is a historic part of the town, there wouldn't be any 'civic pride' left if it moved out of town? Very little public awareness or the chance to respond. The project could cost considerably with Consultants giving advice. Council tax payers have a right to be consulted and need to be informed of the proposals and decisions.

Alastair Tod suggested that Councillor Bullock should provide full information now and if a decision been made yet. However, Christopher Thomas wanted the Town Forum to give their views first before asking Councillor Bullock to reply.

Christopher Thomas asked Linda Chamberlain of CAB if the public had aired their views to CAB via Gateway/in person. Linda Chamberlain will report back to the Town Forum with any comments received from the public at the CAB.

Action: Linda Chamberlain will report back to the Town Forum with the comments received from clients requesting services from the CAB.

June Bridgeman stated that she had written to Greg Clark and asked for his comments on this situation. She commented that this was a massive regeneration project for Tunbridge Wells. The Town Hall should be refurbished and it shouldn't leave the town centre. In response Councillor Mayhew would not comment on the confidentiality of the project but reminded the Town Forum that not all the residents of the borough lived in Royal Tunbridge Wells and that the regeneration is for the whole of the borough not just for the town centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells. If there was demand for a vote regarding the Town Hall then the vote would be for the whole borough.

Councillor Price accepted Councillor Mayhew's comments but added that the residents need to be behind the decisions intended to be made.

Michael Doyle commented that many decisions have been made and a regeneration company has been instructed to proceed. The Town Forum and the general public are entitled to know what is going on.

Councillor Neve commented that he is aware of information via emails that there are surveys about to be carried out for TWBC, Town and Country and Land Registry.

Mary Wardrop of Hawkenbury Village Residents Association commented that there would be a lack of car parking for the large amount of staff/police who would work at the Land Registry.

Michael Doyle mentioned that a special exempt Council meeting had taken place, which he believed permitted TWBC to acquire another property. He believed the normal 'calling for scrutiny' was waived and in his opinion did not bode well.

Maggie Fraser explained that the Over 50's Forum is 'up in arms' over the regeneration of the Town Hall and requested that TWBC supply the public more information and facts. All the amenities like the library and adult education etc are very good and would 'rip the heart' out of the town – ludicrous idea!

John Goodfellow commented that he believed if they (TWBC) decided they would purchase Land Registry, they would be able to purchase the building at a much better price than advertised. John Goodfellow asked was that the correct way to use what is effectively tax payer money i.e. buy something at a discount now and deprive central government coffers the real time market return.

Councillor Neve reported that costs of the regeneration company so far he believes were £330k. He asked why the Town Forum hadn't been consulted before and will the regeneration company look at the refurbishment of the interior of the Town Hall also? Councillor Neve also made reference to Valuation Officers arriving on site.

Councillor Ransley mentioned that the report has to go to full Council for ratification next week and the decision will be reported once it has been made.

Helen Featherstone (member of the public – St James) commented that in her opinion the public seem to be unaware of the regeneration company. Town centre to Hawkenbury transport links are quite poor, the town centre will just be full of shops if the re-location was to proceed.

Judy Walters (member of the public – Stone Street) commented that she was appalled at the possible re-location and that the Town Hall should remain in the town centre.

Councillor Bulman commented that TWBC must listen carefully to its public, it is crucially important that there is a proper and full consultation, the cinema site is an eyesore and needs to be re-generated too. Cllr Bulman did say there would still be a theatre in the centre of town; Trinity Theatre which is a very good resource that won't be affected by the re-generation. Cllr Bulman did declare that he was a Trustee of the Trinity Theatre.

Jane Fenwick commented that the relocation of resources is usually a cost cutting exercise and the move to Hawkenbury could cost Council Tax payers more, she requested that the relocation costs be available to the public to view.

Councillor Scholes reported that the Town Hall has links and connections to many organisations, there have been no consultation with the public, this is a symbolic part of the town, he is annoyed that the decision had been made without Councillor consultation.

Mary Wardrop read out Councillor Mrs Moore's comments from the minutes of 27 May meeting, she had visited Gateway to view the 'Town Centre Area Action Plan', but was unable to get an answer for the questions she asked staff at Gateway. She felt she had learned nothing from the exhibition because staff could not answer questions.

June Bridgeman asked Councillor Mayhew to comment. Councillor Mayhew explained that as a Director of the regeneration company she was unable to comment at the moment on the regeneration company's position.

June Bridgeman distributed a document which she urged the members of the Town Forum to pass a resolution on.

Councillor Price reported that he had tried hard to obtain information about the £380k costs of the regeneration company. The public needs to know more about the decisions being made.

Jane Fenwick commented that a statement needs to be published which shows clearly the overheads of both buildings. Town Hall is a high maintenance building due to its age, we need to look for either a newer building or ensure the Town Hall is refurbished so that it is a more energy efficient building.

Mr Goodfellow agreed with the comments of Councillor Price.

Christopher Thomas commented that there was a total lack of communication regarding this project. He said that 'due process' must be complied with, otherwise there would be problems ahead. The Chairman asked Councillor Bullock, and the Councillors present, for their assurance that they would comply with the public wishes and that full communication be ensured.

Councillor Bullock reported that there is no agreement to purchase any building at present. There will be no abolishment of the borough. No transfer of public money. The area action plan poses a series of questions which illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of Town's within the borough. This is an open document for the public to view and comment on.

Councillor Bullock agreed and explained the regeneration company is looking at the viability of all buildings concerned. He referred to and read out a letter from Jonathan MacDonald, Director of Regeneration and Sustainability.

Councillor Bullock reiterated that nothing had been bought and that TWBC was going through the process. Hopefully October 2010 will be the time when the public will be able to air their views and will be consulted. TWBC will then answer all questions and a decision will be made on the outcome of the Town Hall. Councillor Bullock reported that he will not allow the regeneration company to proceed unless it is a viable option. Councillor Bullock stated that public views on the town centre seem to be mainly two major issues which are the traffic congestion and the cinema site.

Christopher Thomas thanked Councillor Bullock for his assurances and requested that the Town Forum be kept informed of the plans, designs and that there was full communication. It was suggested the information could be promoted on the Town Forum website as well.

Christopher Thomas read out the motion distributed by June Bridgeman. The document asked on behalf of the members of the Town Forum to ask all Councillors to;

- i. Oppose the relocation of the Town Hall functions elsewhere*
- ii. Set in hand an urgent examination of how the interior of the existing complex of Civic Centre buildings can be modernised and opened up for a wider range of Civic uses.*
- iii. Oppose any commitment the purchase of Hawkenbury, Land Registry meanwhile.*

June Bridgeman proposed this motion, Michael Doyle and John Goodfellow seconded it. Councillor Ransley commented that the regeneration company would have little interest in refurbishing the Town Hall as there would be very little revenue for the regeneration company to gain.

Councillor Williams informed the Town Forum that there is a seven page document for the public to read at both Tunbridge Wells library and Gateway and urged them to do so.

Councillor Bulman had concerns over the proposals in the motion, after consultation with the Town Forum, it was redrafted to read:

Before any further actions are taken to relocate the Town Hall or purchase an alternative property, a proper examination and review is undertaken in order to engage public discussion. This Forum recognises and accepts that insufficient information is in the public domain. In order to properly engage with residents about the future of the Town Hall we urge this Council to take appropriate steps to advise the public before any further decisions are taken.

This alteration was proposed by Councillor Scholes and seconded by Councillor Price. Mary Harris (Courier) was thanked by the Town Forum for her attendance and coverage of the Town Hall regeneration. She asked that it be noted that the front page coverage in a recent copy of the Courier of the regeneration of the Town Hall plans was sourced from the KCC website. She reported that it was discovered that the information had been inadvertently put on the website by a KCC Officer.

Following the withdrawal of June Bridgeman's motion, Christopher Thomas proposed the newly worded motion from Councillor Bulman, this was seconded by Councillor Scholes. There was a majority vote, not all voted, Councillor Williams was against the proposal.

Any other business

Christopher Thomas informed the Town Forum that Daniel Bech's funeral was being held on the 29th June at 10.30 at Tunbridge Wells Crematorium.

Meeting closed.

Dates of next meetings of the Town Forum

- **2010**
- 29 July 2010 at 6.30pm
- 30 September 2010 at 6.30pm
- 28 October 2010 at 6.30pm
- 25 November 2010 at 6.30pm
- 16 December 2010 meeting – provisional,
there is a possibility of holding this meeting in a different venue and at a different time.

2011

- 27 January 2011 at 6.30pm
- 24 February 2011 at 6.30pm
- 31 March 2011 at 6.30pm
- 28 April 2011 at 6.30pm
- 26 May 2011 at 6.30pm
- 30 June 2011 at 6.30pm
- 28 July 2011 at 6.30pm
- August – no meeting
- 29 September 2011 at 6.30pm
- 27 October 2011 at 6.30pm
- 24 November 2011 at 6.30pm
- 15 December 2011 at 6.30pm