



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

24 November 2011, 6.30pm
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells

MINUTES

In attendance: Anne Forster (Friends of TW Library, Museum & Art Gallery), Carole Ann Barnes (Transition Tunbridge Wells), Chris Morris (Beulah Road Resident's Association), Christopher Thomas (Woodbury Close Residents' Association), Councillor Crawford (Broadwater Ward & Vice Chairman of the Town Forum), Councillor James Scholes (Pantiles & St Mark's Ward) (County Councillor Tunbridge Wells South), Councillor Mrs Mayhew (Park Ward), David Wakefield (Inner London Road Residents' Association), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), John Cunningham (Warwick Park Residents' Association), John Forster (Civic Society of Royal Tunbridge Wells), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Johnathan Brooks (Friends of the Grove), Katherina Mahler-Bech (Telephone House Neighbours Association), Stephen Bowser (Residents First), Lesley Herriot (Skinners Six Road Residents' Association), Maggie Fraser (Tunbridge Wells Over Fifties Forum), Mary Wardrop (Sherbourne Close Management Committee), Peter Perry (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Philip Whitbourn (Guest), Sally Balcon (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Common), Steven Marshall (Association of Pantiles Traders), June Bridgeman (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery);

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from: Jane Fenwick – Calverley Park Association; Kate Bishop – Calverley Park Association; Michael Holman – Tunbridge Wells Twinning; Dorothea Holman – Boyne Park Residents Association; Roger Walsh – Upper Stone Street Residents Association; Angela Phillips – Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery; Councillor Trevor Poile; Michele Hull – Camden Park Residents Association; John Mattei – Royal British Legion

2. Declarations of substitute members

3. Membership changes

- a) Membership applications:
The Forum agreed the application for membership from St John's Road Residents' Association.
- b) Changes of Representation:
The Forum noted a change of representation from the Association of Pantiles Traders.

4. Minutes of the meeting dated 27 September 2011

The minutes were agreed as a correct record.

It was noted that Maggie Fraser and David Morris had attended the last meeting but had not been recorded as attending.

5. Forward Plan

The Chairman introduced the Forward Plan item, and explained that items expected to be discussed on forthcoming Town Forum agendas would be listed on the Forward Plan. The items had been organised in conjunction with the Forward Plans of TWBC and KCC. Forum members could ask for additional items to be added.

A Forum member asked for an item on developer contributions to be added. It was noted that these weren't always requested in TW and it would be helpful to understand why this was. Further, large contractors were known to offer local apprenticeships schemes, and it was asked if TWBC were encouraging this on applications.

The draft infrastructure levy was also highlighted, with reference to DCLG's consultation. It was felt important to have someone explain the legislation changes.

Councillor Mayhew noted that more power would filter down to local levels, and properly constituted town and parish councils would receive more influence in decision making. It was important for the Town Forum to think about that powers it may have in the future. Councillor Mayhew went on to say that schools in the area very rarely received contributions from developers. The criteria for receiving this was impractical, but was set by KCC.

6. Matters arising

6a) Special expenses

Mr Rodney Stone from the Commons Conservators addressed the meeting and explained the purpose of the Conservators, and how the organisation was funded. It was explained that 90% levied on the Borough related to parks, gardens and Tunbridge Wells Common. A precept was issued in January each year following discussion with the Borough Council and was currently at £128,000 which was below the legal cap set by the government. Other sources of income included money from freehold tenants. The raised precept paid for normal running expenses, but there was very little money for capital projects.

Gary Stephenson, Head of Environment and Street Scene addressed the meeting and explained that the Special Expenses covered things relating to the parks within the town area. This included the Level Ground but not Dunorlan Park. The Special Expenses were used to ensure residents were not taxed twice for the same service, or for services not in their area. Some of the street lighting in the borough was maintained by TWBC, and cemeteries in the town were also paid for by Special Expenses. Non Tunbridge Wells residents were charged an extra rate if they used the cemetery. There were still some financial issues to resolve regarding Rusthall Parish Council and how expenses would be divided in the future.

It was asked if Rusthall parish would pay less council tax, and how it would be split. Mr Stephenson said that the formula for this was not known yet, but it would need to be fair to all. It was asked whether there would be consultation for this decision and Councillor Scholes replied that the 2012-2013 budget would have a consultation period where residents could make comments.

It was asked if a parish councillor could sit on the Board of Conservators. Mr Stone replied that this had been considered and the parish council invited to send a non-voting representative .

It was noted that Rusthall had been keen to become parished many years ago, with the main aim for keeping money that resident's paid within the area. Rusthall common was not as well maintained as the rest of the commons and had been neglected for several years. It was further noted that Rusthall common would remain under the auspices of the Conservators, regardless of whether the area was parished.

It was asked if Rusthall parish would pay a contribution to the commons. Councillor Scholes replied that it was agreed in principle that some expenses would be reimbursed to the TWBC. It was recognised that Tunbridge Wells Common was more extensively used than Rusthall common, simply because of the cricket ground and rocks. Discussions regarding how the precept for Rusthall should be financed were still ongoing.

The Chairman said that the Town Forum would be looking at the steps taken by TWBC regarding Rusthall Parish Council as part of the budget consultation.

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6b) Advisory Panel on the Town's Future

A Town Forum member, Mr Phillip Whitbourne, gave the Town Forum an update on the initial work of the Advisory Panel.

It was asked whether members of the public could attend the meetings. Mr Whitbourne replied that this was the intention, but the initial sessions would remain private to help the panel devise terms of reference etc.

It was asked whether the Regeneration Company was discussed and Mr Whitbourne said there was no further update aside from what the Leader had already stated.

It was noted that there was not much time between the Town Centre Area Action Plan being produced and when the infrastructure levy was set. Town Forum members needed to think carefully about what they wanted in their area. Mr Whitbourne agreed and hoped that residents would come forward with their views about what they wanted to see. In principle an overall plan for the centre of Tunbridge Wells was needed that met most aspirations and hopes, and in which major significant development fitted.

The Chairman asked for a further update in April, at which time the Town Forum could feed in its own ideas about what the area needed.

6c) Ice skating rink

The Chairman invited members of the Town Forum to visit the Ice Skating Rink with him on Saturday 10 December at 5pm.

7. Oral reports from councillors

There were none.

8. Reports from the Town Forum Management Committee

There were none.

9. Any other business

The Chairman asked if there were any comments on the new Members' Pack produced for the Town Forum members. It was noted that the pack was very useful, but updated editions could include a list of Town Forum members with contact details, borough councillor contact details, budget data for TWBC and the tax bandings for the town centre.

Councillor Mayhew highlighted to members that the new community infrastructure levy could filter down to the lowest level of governance, and the Town Forum needed to consider how it might wish to spend any money from developments in the town.

It was noted that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Scrutiny Officer, Mike McGeary, requested two members of the Town Forum to sit on a Public Realm Scrutiny Project. Ann Stobo and John Cunningham volunteered to sit on this project.

The concept of a Jubilee year fountain was proposed, and it was noted that there was sufficient public interest in this. There were many options to consider, but it was suggested that the Town Forum take this work further and discuss what would be possible.

It was noted that public fountains could be very expensive to maintain and for health and safety reasons the water would need to be of swimming pool quality. The idea was very popular, but the Town Forum needed to be realistic about the possibilities, and where the money would come from to finance it.

The Chairman noted that the Courier was looking into the possibility of holding a Town Carnival in 2013, which would replace the Pagent. The Town Forum had been asked if they were interested in supporting this idea and members felt this was appropriate. It was noted that a sedan chair race and a Georgian weekend were also being investigated to help promote tourism in the area.

Date of the next meeting: 26 January 2012