



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 25 June 2009

1. Present:

Stuart Anderson (Beulah Road Residents' Association), Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Graham Bell (Pantiles Traders' Association), Betsey Dix (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association), Arthur Hutchins (4 Roads Residents' Association), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Users' Association), Christopher Thomas (RTW Town Forum Chairman, The Goodwins Nos 1&2 Residents' Company / Woodbury Close Residents' Association), Alastair Tod (RTW Civic Society) and Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association).

Councillors: Ronen Basu (Culverden) Peter Crawford (Vice-Chairman, Broadwater), Barry Edwards (Rusthall), Mrs Mary Lewis (St James), John Miller (Culverden), James Scholes (Pantiles & St Mark's) and Frank Williams (Sherwood).

Others in attendance: Carole Ann Barnes (Transition Tunbridge Wells), Kent County Councillor John Davies, Christine Davis (Bloom Committee) and Samantha Timms (TWBC Senior Committee Administrator).

2. Apologies:

Peter Perry (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Simon Smith (Inner London Road Residents' Association) and David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association).
Councillors Roy Bullock (TWBC Leader), Mrs Lesley Herriot (St John's), Mrs Tracy Moore (St John's) and Mrs Catherine Mayhew (Parks).

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

3. Membership Changes

No membership changes were reported.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 30 April 2009

The minutes were agreed.

Matters Arising: None.

5. Action Outstanding from the Meeting dated 31 July 2008

ON GOING ACTION

9.3 That all representatives from **any association/member to provide details of activities** that they had undertaken and/or want to promote to Daniel Bech in order for them to be included on the Town Form's website so that all members could know what was happening. This is particularly important so as to avoid duplication of activity and to show a single voice for Councillors to deal with.

The Chairman, Christopher Thomas, reiterated the fact that if any association/member wishes other Town Forum members to be aware of their organisation's activities, they need to inform Daniel Bech in order for them to be included on the Town Form's website. All representatives are reminded to inform the Town Forum of concerns held by residents, who may not be represented on the Town Forum, but wish for a platform to raise such concerns.

Action Outstanding from the Meeting dated 25 September 2008

- 10.1 That Christopher Thomas write a letter to the Clerk of the Commons, Rodney Stone, to seek clarification on the Private Parking Contract.

Update - Christopher Thomas stated that he had researched the car parking contract and had been advised the income from this arrangement was put back into the Commons. If this income was not coming then the Commons' precept would have been higher. Christopher Thomas therefore suggested that the Town Forum invite the Commons Conservators to attend a future meeting to explain what the Commons Conservators do and to make the Town Form aware of their expenses and figures. The Town Form agreed this action.

- 10.1.1 That Christopher Thomas invite the Commons Conservators to a future meeting of the Town Forum to provide awareness of their work and expenses.

Christopher Thomas informed the Town Form that some dates for the Commons Conservators to attend a future Town Forum meeting had been given. Christopher Thomas would keep members informed of when a date had been agreed. ACTION COMPLETE Conservators coming in October.

Action Outstanding from 26 March 2009 meeting:

- 7.1 That the Town Forum submit a response to the Core Strategy and questionnaire once published (April 2009). Action completed at June meeting.
- 8.1 John Goodfellow to update the Town Form at their next meeting on the outcome of the Select Committee's meeting dated 6 April.

Actions Completed from 30 April 2009 meeting:

- 6.1 That Councillor Mrs Mayhew, in conjunction with Planning and Leisure Services, create a table that lists the 106 Agreements and what the monies had been spent on. The table and the criteria for 106 Agreements be circulated to the Town Forum in due course.

This action is not complete and is still outstanding as Cllr Mayhew has yet to supply.

6. Reports from Borough Councillors

Councillor Basu – informed members that a Bloom Committee had been established to oversee the floral displays within the town centre. The details would be discussed in full at their meeting next week. The Chairman stated that there was a budget of £15,000 and that the Town Forum would have a say as to how the money was spent. Members were informed of the Bloom Committee membership as follows: Cllr Basu, Kate Sergeant, Daniel Bech, Alastair Tod, Wendy Thomas (St John's Retailers), Jon Wright (Camden Road Retailers), Nigel Bolton (TWBC), Christopher Thomas, Christine Davies and Gill Field (TWGGS)

An update will be provided at the next Town Forum meeting.

- Minutes of inaugural meeting 29.06.2009:

<http://www.townforum.org.uk/vision/rtwbloom2010-meeting290609.pdf>

7. Reports from Champions/Vision Committee

Planning Matters – Daniel Bech informed the Town Form that the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) had met; one of the ‘good news stories’ resulting from the meeting was that Skinners was now an Academy. The Skinners’ Company was the lead sponsor, with Kent County Council and West Kent College as co-sponsors, in founding an Academy to replace Tunbridge Wells High School. This was now confirmed.

A presentation would be given at the July’s Town Forum meeting, which shall raise various ‘Greener and Cleaner’ issues and highways concerns. Should any Town Form member have any ideas to include in the presentation, please contact Daniel Bech direct.

ACTION –

- 7.1 Should any Town Form member have an idea for inclusion in the presentation, to contact Daniel Bech direct.

Vision and Arts Committee – No matters arising.

Environment / Green Issues – Kate Sergeant updated the Town Form on various issues as follows:

- Allotment usage was increasing.
- Transition Tunbridge Wells had submitted proposals for a sustainable Tunbridge Wells.
- A meeting would be taking place regarding bees at the Camden Centre at 7.30pm on 26 June 2009.
- Oxfam was organising a ‘Climate Hearing’ with visitors from Uganda and Bangladesh talking about how climate changes affect their communities. Local speakers will also be present to talk about how people in Tunbridge Wells were responding to climate change. The ‘Climate Hearing’ will be held at the Calverley Grounds Bandstand at 3pm on Monday 6 July 2009.

Transport and Health Matters – John Goodfellow gave updates on the following issues:

Transport

- Off-road cycle ways were ongoing and were pushing forward at a steady pace. Daniel Bech expressed concerns that the off-road cycle ways were not environmentally friendly as they were too wide and were tarmac. It was suggested that John should speak with Nigel Bolton, Head of Leisure and Wellbeing, as to the required width of the cycle ways. Costs were also a concern for the Town Form and raised issues relating to the tender process, together with the design of the cycle ways.
- A new rail timetable for Tunbridge Wells to London would come into force in December 2009.
- Construction work is being carried out near Farmcombe Road. The construction company had been storing their equipment in the open space on Farmcombe Road, which had sufficient security gates. However, vandals had entered the site and vandalised machinery.

Health

- Travel to hospital and whether members of the public could be re-assured that there would be safe travel to the new hospital; this would be included within the Travel Plan. John went on to say that the Travel Plan Coordinator was involved in the Travel Plan Survey and it was hoped that the Town Forum would be engaged with the survey. It was suggested to John that he should speak with the Voluntary Action Group for West Kent.

8. Future Dates of Town Forum Meetings 2010

Samantha Timms, Senior Committee Administrator and Clerk to the Town Forum, asked for members' approval relating to the future dates of the Town Forum meetings. The Town Form was informed that subsequent to the agenda despatch, it was necessary to change the 29 April 2010 meeting to a week earlier to 22 April 2010 due to the Election preparation.

The Town Form also agreed to provisionally hold a Town Forum meeting on 16 December 2010, mainly because the original December meeting was near Christmas; this date would be confirmed nearer the time. However, it was noted that the December meeting may need to be moved to a different location and a later start time to accommodate Christmas celebrations. Christopher Thomas agreed to investigate an alternative venue for this meeting.

The Town Form was also requested to agree a new start time for the meetings. Due to a reduction in staff numbers supporting the Town Hall, the Council was looking to ensure that meetings finish at 8.30pm. The Town Form, after giving due consideration, agreed that the start time of the Town Forum would be 6.30pm with immediate effect from the 30 July 2009 meeting. Town Form members wished it to be noted that they were far from happy with the winding down of Town Hall opening hours, which was quite vocally expressed by Michael Doyle.

AGREED –

- (1) That the Town Forum agree the list of 2010 dates below:
28 January, 25 February, 25 March, 22 April, 27 May, 29 June, 29 July,
29 September, 28 October and 25 November.
- (2) That the Town Form agree to provisionally hold the 16 December 2010 meeting, but in the meantime explore the possibility of holding this meeting in a different venue and later start time; and
- (3) That the Town Forum meetings start time be **6.30pm**.

9. Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Area Action Plan Consultation

Daniel Bech advised members that the Town Form had responded to the Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Area Action Plan; those comments were appended to the agenda and were also available on the Town Form's website.

<http://www.townforum.org.uk/consultation/corestrategy-rtwtcaaplan-questionnaire-rtwtf080609.pdf>

Daniel then summarised for the Town Form each of the answers submitted.

The Town Form noted that in relation to question 1, far more importance should be brought to 'Social Engineering' due to the uncontrolled social influence created by the unregulated private sector 'letting industry', letting a big part of the town's centre to an unknown and mostly unquantifiable transient population. Daniel went on to say that the Council must understand what actually constitutes the residential population and reflect that in policies governing not only 'new build' but also the letting industry.

The answer to number 3 stated that the town centre had to become more pedestrian friendly and look at more striking views for pedestrians (more trees, better floral displays, decorative roundabouts, benches, less visible commercial refuse bins, better integration of residential refuse bins, heritage-style lampposts instead of motorway lampposts and no tarmac patched brick pavement).

Question 11 - Uses appropriate for Royal Tunbridge Wells – Daniel concluded that previous town centre town houses which were converted into offices should be brought back to residential use, preferably to their original purpose, family town houses. Sites like the former Cinema site – if the Town Hall/Crescent Road car park were coming forward for residential development – could be used for purpose-built office blocks. The vision of the the Town Forum was that a Town Hall was traditionally in the town centre; the location could be flexible within the town centre as the new way of administration was changing. The traditional Town Hall could be scaled down drastically but its presence should still be felt by residents; the Gateway should not be seen as a Town Hall replacement.

The Town Form thanked everyone who was responsible for replying to the consultation document.

10. Any Other Business

Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society

Alastair Tod updated the Town Form on the current activities of the Civic Society. He stated that the membership of the Society arises during the year as subscriptions come in and at present, 430 members all live in Royal Tunbridge Wells. The business of the RTWCS was managed by an Executive of 14, each of whom has specific responsibilities and reports to monthly meetings. He went on to explain that two vice-presidents and other members had supporting roles.

The objectives of the Society were highlighted for members' information, together with the Policy work and local history. Alastair went on to say that quarterly newsletters were published and widely read. To celebrate the Society's Golden Jubilee, the garden party would be held in Eridge Park, with a birthday party at Trinity with a Town Walk and presentation by Philip Whitbourn. Awards were also presented at an annual ceremony for excellence in design and craftsmanship and more recently the Society had added awards for shop fronts and community contribution.

The Town Form thanked Alastair for submitting the report; the Town Form then asked questions to Alastair.

Alastair was asked whether or not the Civic Trust was still in existence.
– He answered by saying that the Civic Society was registered with the Trust but unfortunately the Trust had since gone into administration. An alternative was being explored.

Daniel Bech expressed his concern that the desired views of the Civic Society's commemorative panorama on Mount Ephraim were blocked by about 25% due to trees standing in front of it. He asked for assurance that no trees would be cut as a consequence.
– Alastair Tod replied and said that there would be no cutting to trees and that in Tunbridge Wells, trees were part of the views.

Daniel questioned further, who would be responsible for maintaining the structure of the panorama.
– Alastair answered that he had an outstanding answer from the Council regarding maintenance, but if the Council would not want to commit themselves, the Civic Society would take over the responsibility and cost for maintenance.

Daniel circulated two pictures - one was the panoramic view from Mount Ephraim and the other was the 'closing view' of York Road towards Mount Ephraim. York Road was a tree lined road and would lose an important focus should these trees on the Common be felled.

<http://www.telephonehouse.org.uk/current.html>

Alastair was also asked whether the Civic Society was interacting with younger people.
– Alastair stated that the Society had involved schools in the past but not at present. It was suggested that the Society write to each of the local secondary schools and inform them of the Civic Society and the work that it undertakes, together with information about the Town Forum.

Graham Bell stated that secondary schools do have space within their curriculum to look at local history. Christopher Thomas said that he would assist Alastair in finding out who to speak to.

ACTION –

10.1 Should any member wish to view more information, please visit the Civic Society's website www.thecivicsociety.org

Twinning Town - Wiesbaden Visit

Michael Holman provided members with a summary of the successful Wiesbaden visit that took place in May 2009. He went on to say that the new town entry signs were in place for the visit and thanked everyone who was involved in one way or another in relation to the visit.

The Lord Mayor of Wiesbaden had a very busy programme which was organised by the Town Hall. He and his wife attended the Council's Mayor's Making on 20 May with the Quintet playing in the background. There was a successful concert at the Pantiles on Friday 22 May and at St John's Church on the evening of Saturday 23 May. The Lord Mayor was impressed by the cultural and voluntary work undertaken within the town.

The Town Form noted that new initiatives and opportunities had arisen since the visit and a list of these initiatives/opportunities would be drawn up by the Twinning and Friendship Association and would be included on the Town Forum's website once completed.

The Town Form congratulated Michael and the Twinning Association for their hard work.

ACTION –

10.2 Should any member wish to view initiatives/opportunities that had arisen from the Wiesbaden visit to log on to the Town Form's website.

Gateway

John Higgs expressed concern about the lack of privacy that he had received whilst at the Gateway recently. He went into Gateway to talk about a matter relating to Highways; he had felt a little uncomfortable standing talking to the receptionists about the issues whilst a queue of customers stood behind him. Unfortunately, at the time only one computer had the Kent Highway Services facility and therefore they could not discuss the matter in one of the private booths.

Michael Doyle also expressed concern that the Gateway staff were not easily contactable via telephone; he had contacted the Council's switchboard and wished to speak with a long standing member of the Gateway (who used to be based at the Town Hall Reception) and was told he was unable to be put through to the Gateway member of staff; this he found unacceptable as they should be able to contact any member of staff should they choose to.

Mary Wardrop also stated that as a visitor to the Gateway, it was not easy to identify that the building was in fact the Gateway; there were no visible signs to the left or right approaches to the Gateway. Mary reminded the Chairman of the meeting when it was discussed if the Town Forum should undertake some form of mystery shopping exercise and that her Residents Association was compiling such an account.

ACTION –

10.3 The Town Forum to set up a working party to review the Gateway.

Trees along Clarence Road

Kate Sergeant asked the Town Form that they become aware that trees had been removed along Clarence Road without having prior consultation. Christopher Thomas requested that Kate write a letter on behalf of the Town Forum to Daniel Docker complaining of the lack of consultation.

Mela 2009

Councillor Frank Williams reminded the Town Form that the Tunbridge Wells Mela was taking place on 19 July 2009 in Calverley Grounds.

Calverley Grounds and Calverley Park

Jane Fenwick clarified to the Town Form that Calverley Park was owned by the residents and Calverley Grounds was owned by the Council as the Grounds were often referred to as the Park and this was not correct.

Essential Renewal of Gas Mains in The Pantiles

Graham Bell informed members that there would be essential road works taking place in The Pantiles. The gas mains need to be replaced by Southern Gas to ensure that the supply of gas remains safe and secure. The work will start between 20 July and 29 July and it is expected to be finished in 15 weeks. Southern Gas will do what they can to keep disruption to a minimum and once mains supply has been renewed, a specialist team will restore footpaths and roads.

John Davies, Chairman, Kent County Council (KCC), gives update to the Town Forum

Christopher Thomas asked if John Davies could give a few words on behalf of Kent County Council. Christopher Thomas introduced John as the Vice-Chairman of KCC, but John then informed the Town Forum that he had just become Chairman of KCC. Christopher Thomas congratulated John. The Town Forum membership then gave a round of applause and wished John well in his new appointment.

Christopher Thomas referred to emails that he had sent John Davies. John advised the Town Form that he would indeed be reading the emails, which Christopher Thomas had sent, especially those referring to Kent Highway issues. John said that he was acutely aware of problems relating to road issues and was sympathetic to concerns over tarmac blotches, especially on Mount Pleasant Road around all of the trees.

John then advised that KCC Councillors did have a discretionary fund of £25,000, which they could spend on making highway improvements over and above those that had been scheduled into the Highways' budget. John suggested that perhaps the KCC Councillors for the town centre area could pool each of their £25,000 funds and then be able to produce something extremely meaningful. Such an idea could be for a pedestrian crossing or some other item which could be beneficial to many. John said that these funds could be carried into the next year in order to accrue. John then went on to say that County Councillors also have access to a £10,000 grant which could again be treated by Councillors in the same way and pooled together, but he did not make reference to the ability to carry over these County Council monies to another financial year.

The Town Forum certainly acknowledged this concept and supported it fully.

Christopher Thomas then made reference to how tendering of contractors was undertaken and how costings were put together. John was not able to answer this as it was not his remit. John said, by way of confirmation that he would certainly be reading the emails sent by Christopher Thomas and was looking to obtain answers for the Town Forum.

Christopher Thomas thanked John for his input and information and also for the interest he had shown in the Town Forum and in the matters they were raising.

11. Dates of next meetings of the Town Form – The Town Forum agreed to the following:

- 30 July 2009 at 6.30pm – Kent Highway Services and ‘Cleaner & Greener’ presentation
- 24 September 2009 at 6.30pm
- 29 October 2009 at 6.30pm – Commons Conservators - in attendance, Rodney Stone (Clerk), Ian Marshall (Freehold Tenant) and Steve Budden (Warden).
- 26 November 2009 at 6.30pm – Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust - in attendance, Frank Sims
- 17 December 2009 at 6.30pm – provisional

2010

- 28 January 2010 at 6.30pm
- 25 February 2010 at 6.30pm
- 25 March 2010 at 6.30pm
- 22 April 2010 at 6.30pm
- 27 May 2010 at 6.30pm
- 24 June 2010 at 6.30pm
- 29 July 2010 at 6.30pm
- . / . August 2010
- 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 also a possibility of holding this meeting in a different venue and at a different time.

30 July 2009 is the next full Town Forum - Any reports/short papers to be emailed/posted to Samantha Timms by no later than 10am on Monday 13 July 2009.

12. The meeting closed at: 9.30pm.