



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 25 October 2007

1. Present:

Jenny Alexander (Rusthall Village Association), Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Jenny Blackburn (Rusthall Village Association), Graham Bradley (Hanover and Rock Villa Residents' Association), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Betsey Dix (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Matt Goodwin (Village Residents' Association), John Higgs (Hanover Road and Rock Villa Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Ian Naismith (Hanover and Rock Villa Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Users' Association), Alastair Tod (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Christopher Thomas (The Goodwins Nos.1&2 Residents' Company), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association), David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association), Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association) and Tricia Wright (Calverley Park Association).
- Councillors Barry Edwards and James Scholes.

2. Apologies:

Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Richard Gould (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Simon Smith (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Chris Weller (Calverley Park Association)
- Councillors Roy Bullock, Mrs Barbara Cobbold, Lesley Herriot, Mrs Catherine Mayhew, John Miller, Leonard Price, Frank Williams.

3. Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair

Christopher Thomas and Jenny Blackburn were elected Chair and Vice-Chair of the Town Forum, respectively. Michael Larsen proposed Christopher Thomas as Chair and was seconded by John Higgs. Matt Goodwin proposed Jenny Blackburn as Vice-Chair and was seconded by John Goodfellow.

(Matt Goodwin in the Chair for the duration of the meeting)

4. Membership Changes

John Dutton has resigned from his position of Chairman to the Clarendon Area Residents' Association and also from the Town Forum; Mr David Thompson, the Chairman for the Clarendon Area Residents' Association, will replace him.

5. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 26 July 2007

The minutes were agreed, subject to the following amendments:

Addition to minute '1.0 Present in Attendance':

'Councillor Williams and David Webster'

Amendment to minute '2.0 Apologies', 4th line:

Delete the words 'Calverley Park Association' after Mary Wardrop's name and replace with 'Hawkenbury Village Association'.

6. Matters Arising/Actions Completed from the Meeting dated 22 March 2007

Actions outstanding from 26 July 2007 Forum:

Actions:

- 5.1 Matt Goodwin to contact Janet Naim regarding the job description for the Press Officer.
- 5.2 Councillor Bullock to report back to the Town Forum on any progress being made on land ownership at the Station/Morrisons.
- 5.3 Matt Goodwin to circulate the dates of his meetings with the Directors to the Town Forum as soon as possible.

Actions Completed:

- 5.6 Sean Clark to reply to Daniel Bech regarding reference to business rates being paid on empty buildings i.e. Cinema Site. ([appendix A](#))
- 8.1 Members of the Town Forum to contact Samantha Timms should they require a copy of the Position Statement for Planning.
- 8.2 That Samantha Timms email the Position Statement link to all members of the Town Forum and Town Forum Councillors who have access to email.
- 8.3 That a letter be written to Roy Bullock requesting Town Forum funding. Awaiting reply.
- 9.1 That Sean Clark be asked whether or not business rates were automatically increased when shop owners placed tables and chairs outside their premises. ([appendix A](#))
- 9.2 That Gary Stevenson be asked the details concerning how the contractor was appointed, how the tender process worked and how was it carried out. ([appendix B](#))

7. Reports from Borough Councillors

None received.

8. Presentation by Loïs Howell; Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services

Loïs Howell, Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services briefed the Town Forum on the establishment of parish councils under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill. This Bill was introduced in June 2007 after the White Paper had been issued. She stated that recent amendments had already been made to the Bill and that it was unclear as to when the Bill would become an Act.

The Town Forum noted that there appeared to be no proposal to amend the current Local Government and Rating Act 1997, but that the proposal would be an addition. The new requirement stated that local authorities were to conduct a "Community Governance Review", which involved an assessment of whether local governance in a specific area reflects local needs and characteristics. The results of the review may lead to the establishment of new, or differently constituted local Councils, which may be called Community or Neighbourhood Councils, in addition to the current parish and town councils already in existence.

Most existing parish councils had been set up using Church boundaries; the new local councils could be focussed on alternative centres, for instance a large housing estate.

Loïs went on to explain that a District Council could be compelled to conduct a "Community Governance Review" if petitioned to do so by a qualifying number of electors in the area:

Up to 500 electors – 50% of electors would need to petition
500 to 2,500 electors – 250 of electors would need to petition
2,500 > electors – 10% of electors would need to sign petition

The petition must specify the area that would be covered by the review sought and a recommendation set out, for instance, change of boundary or creation of new local council (community/neighbourhood council).

The local authority receiving such a petition would have to carry out the review and would need to implement full consultation; this would ensure that “community governance in the area under review reflected the identities and interests of the community and would be effective and convenient”.

Members of the Town Forum noted that at present, there were eight borough wards that do not have parish or town councils.

Angela Woodhouse, Overview and Scrutiny Partnership Manager, stated that the Corporate Services Select Committee would be meeting in November 2007 to set a timetable for action in relation to the new Bill in preparation for when the Bill becomes an Act.

The Select Committee would be consulting various organisations, like the Town Forum, for input, such as, what do neighbourhoods want, what is important in the local areas etc, all the information would then be collated and pros and cons would be considered. Workshops and meetings would be arranged and local people were encouraged to attend. The Overview and Scrutiny Partnership Manager stated that once a date had been set up, Town Forum members would be informed.

Matt Goodwin pointed out that a Town Forum meeting was taking place on 7 February 2008 and asked for agreement that it be set aside for the Urban Parishing workshop – the Town Forum agreed and asked that the Overview and Scrutiny team attend to seek the Town Forum’s views and particularly their views on what constitute important local issues. The Town Forum also asked that the Overview and Scrutiny team come prepared with financial information relating to how the new “community/neighbourhood parishes” would be funded.

Lois, on closing the discussion, urged Town Forum members to visit Ashford Borough Council’s website as they had started to go down the urban parishing route.

The Town Forum thanked Lois and Angela for their attendance and asked that Lois circulate some guidance notes on powers and functions of parish councils and general information relating to the Bill.

Action:

8.1 That Lois Howell circulate guidance notes on powers and functions of parish councils and general information relating to the Bill.

9. Reports from Committees

Planning Committee – Philip Whitbourn briefed members of the Town Forum on the White Paper, “Planning for a Sustainable Future”, and that a response in the form of answers to 40 questions posed by the Government was despatched on time.

The Planning Committee’s report covered various other issues including the Position Statement on Planning. At the July meeting of the Town Forum, Robert Cottrill, Director of Planning and Development had been given a copy of the Town Forum’s June ‘Position Statement’, no comments had been received regarding the document. However, on 22 October 2007, Philip and Daniel Bech met with Robert Cottrill and covered a wide range of issues, including the Forum’s ‘Position Statement’.

The Town Forum was updated on the work carried out on the 'master plan', or town centre action plans within the Local Development Framework and was scheduled to start shortly.

Robert had reported that proposals were expected to come forward for the refurbishment of Ely Court and that they would require planning permission. The Market Square was still in mind for possible extension of the Centre, and internal alterations within the Centre were not considered to need planning permission. It was noted that Westfield now had only 25% financial stake in the Royal Victoria Place. Town Forum members asked Philip who owned the remainder; Philip agreed to find this out.

Philip and Daniel had also met with Leisure Services and informed the Town Forum that Nigel Bolton, Head of Leisure Services, had given them an update on the situation regarding the Museum and Library Project. The full Lottery bid of £5 million had not been successful, however, Nigel had stated that they were going back to Heritage Lottery with another slightly smaller bid. The Town Forum would be kept informed on the outcome.

The Town Forum was also informed that the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Cabinet had had a report submitted on 25 October regarding the sale of the Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons and Title of Lord of the Manor of Rusthall. Philip stated that the Trustees had appointed agents to oversee the sale and that they had approved that the marketing process begin. The process would last for six weeks and that the assets would be sold in two packages: a) The Pantiles and b) The Commons and the Title of the Manor of Rusthall, including the following properties: 26 London Road Forecourt, 12/16 London Road, Rusthall Cricket Ground, Linden Park Cricket Ground, Fir Tree Car Park and Fairground Car Park.

A report had also been submitted to that same Cabinet regarding the Town Hall; Cabinet had agreed that it be considered as part of the overall list of Council assets being considered as part of the Town Centre Regeneration project. When Philip and Daniel had met with Robert, he had suggested that a discussion paper be submitted from the Town Forum relating to the possible future use of the Town Centre, but only if time and resources permitted. Matt considered that this in fact should be a priority for the Forum.

The Cinema Site was discussed and the Town Forum considered it a disgrace and a shame for the town that the site had been left to decay. The Town Forum resolved to write to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Roy Bullock, and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development, Councillor Mrs Thomas expressing their very strong view that at the least the existing site should be demolished. This would be better visually and would encourage local residents that things were moving forward. It was suggested that if the site was demolished it could become an open space until a final decision of its use was agreed.

The Town Forum agreed that Christopher Thomas, as the new Chairman, should write to Roy Bullock and Elizabeth Thomas.

Action:

9.1 Philip Whitbourn to find out who owned the remaining 75% of the Royal Victoria Place.

9.2 That the Town Forum submit a 'discussion paper' to Robert Cottrill giving possible future uses for the Town Hall.

9.3 That Christopher Thomas write to the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio for Planning and Development regarding the Forum's views on the Cinema Site.

Vision Committee – Michael Holman informed the Town Forum that ‘An International Strategy for Kent’ seminar was taking place on Tuesday 6 November at 7.30pm at St John’s Church Centre, St John’s Road, Tunbridge Wells. This was an event organised by the Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association in conjunction with the Heusenstamm Friendship Circle of Tonbridge and the United Nations Association (Tunbridge Wells). Alex King MBE, Deputy Leader of Kent County Council would be addressing the meeting.

Transport Committee – John Goodfellow updated the Forum on various issues:

Five-ways Taxi Stand - This Forum initiative was at last cleared to go ahead with four places at the near end of Mount Ephraim Road. The Access Group supported the proposal and felt that the relocation of the bays would not be detrimental to the overall interests of the disabled people. But adequate use by the passengers was essential and signage could be important to ensure this.

Meadow Road Bus Stop -This Forum initiative, spurred by the Beulah Road Residents, was progressing. The triangular area, now a raised greenery bed, would be transformed into a pavement area with seats, information boards and hopefully some shelter by overhead covering. It was part of the office property and the necessary legal agreements were being concluded.

On-Street Parking - A major problem in the town was the excessive all-day on-street parking. A major review and extension of the Parking Zones for permit parking was underway; John Goodfellow had an informative meeting with the Parking Officers on 21 August and would be meeting Councillor Paul Barrington-King, the Cabinet member concerned when the plans are developed.

KCC/TWBC Joint Transportation Board - The Board had received two reports on transport in the town – the first in January 2007 by (then) Councillor Brian Ransley. Although very controversial, there were valuable features and the comments of the KCC Transport officers were still awaited. Similarly, the Forum’s own report “Getting about Tunbridge Wells”, assembled by June Bridgeman, had been presented in April, but the comments of the KCC officers were still needed and John hoped to have those by the January 2008 Joint Transportation Board meeting.

New Lead Member on Transport - Dealing with TWBC effectively in the transport area had been problematic since KCC took over all the Highways work and there had hardly been a “transport” structure. However, a Lead Member on Transport has been recently appointed, Borough Councillor Frank Williams, and the Town Forum should work closely with him.

Public Transport Forum 19 September - Improvements to the railway service were the main topic of the meeting. There was confirmation that Network Rail was to improve the service from RTW to London by providing a siding for stabling trains at TW so they could return back to London and not have to go on to further to/towards Hastings.

Because of Health & Safety, the siding must be on level track and this is being provided from Grove Hill Tunnel most of the way to Strawberry Hill Tunnel (under Forest Road). It will cost £4m as the siding will have to be progressively up to 2m lower than the main line, and the footpath bridge over the railway at the end of Cumberland Walk will have to be replaced by a single span bridge with no piers. - All this to provide an increased service in 2009.

New Pembury Hospital - Planning permission had now been granted at which we made representations on the transport provisions. The Town Forum should continue to work with the Trust to make transport conditions as satisfactory as possible for all users, many being RTW residents.

Housing and Environmental Committee – Nothing to report.

10. Any Other Business

Post Office - Matt Goodwin brought to the Town Forum's attention that the Post Office at St John's Road was due for possible closure; he urged members to support the campaign.

Kent and Sussex Hospital – Christopher Thomas wished to draw to the Town Forum's attention to the recent Healthcare Commission report on the state of the Kent & Sussex Hospital. Further consideration of this issue was deferred to a future meeting..

Website Hits www.townforum.org.uk – Daniel Bech urged members of the Town Forum to forward items of interest on to him so that he could include them on the Town Forum's website. He also informed members that the website had 15,000 hits per week.

Town Forum audit and five key challenges – Matt Goodwin had circulated a number of paper copies of the draft audit report to Roy Bullock on behalf of TWBC on the Town Forum's work in its two year life to date and also the five key challenges for the Borough Council. The Town Forum view was that the report was both accurate and timely and fully representative of their views on priority issues in the Town. It was requested that the report be circulated outside the meeting for formal responses from Town Forum members before being signed on behalf of the Town Forum by both the incoming and the outgoing Chair.

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

- Thursday 29 November at 7.30pm
- Thursday 10 January 2008 at 7.30pm
- Thursday 7 February 2008 at 7.30pm – Workshop, Urban Parishing by Angela Woodhouse, Overview and Scrutiny Partnership Manager
- Thursday 6 March 2008 at 7.30pm

29 November 2007 Town Forum - Any reports/short papers to be e-mailed/posted to Samantha Timms no later than 10 am on Monday 12 November 2007.

APPENDIX A

ACTION POINTS 5.6 AND 9.1 OF 26 JULY 2007 MINUTES

SEAN CLARK'S RESPONSES

National Non Domestic Rates Notes

Empty rates are payable at 50% after a business property has been empty for 3 months.

Only exceptions to this are that no empty rates are charged on listed buildings or industrial buildings such as stores, warehouses, or properties that have a rateable value under £2,200.

All the time a property has a rateable value in the valuation list, empty rates are charged accordingly.

Once a property is demolished, the valuation officer will take the property out of the rating list, so rates liability ceases at that date.

With regard to the cinema site, once demolition starts, the site will be taken out of the valuation list, so any rate liability ceases. At the moment the site is being charged 50% empty rates. (in relation to action point 5.2 That Sean Clark reply regarding reference to business rates being paid on empty buildings)

In answer to your question regarding cafes moving onto pedestrian areas, there is no automatic increase in rates. (Action 9.2 That Sean Clark be asked whether or not business rates were automatically increased when shop owners placed tables and chairs outside their premises.)

The Valuation Office need to be informed (generally through noticing that this has occurred) and criteria that would be considered includes whether there is exclusive use of the area occupied.

APPENDIX B

ACTION 9.2 OF 26 JULY 2007 MINUTES

GARY STEVENSON'S RESPONSE

Gary Stevenson be asked the details concerning how the contractor was appointed, how the tender process worked and how it was carried out.

"The Bulky Waste Collection service is a very small part of the Refuse & Recycling Services Contract. Due to the overall value of this contract EU Procurement Rules apply. These rules set out specific procedures and the subsequent timescales which must be applied.

At the time of going to out tender a notice would have been placed in the European Journal and trade magazine inviting suitably experienced contractors to apply for inclusion on the select list of tenderers. Contractors applying would have been required to complete a pre qualification questionnaire and would also have been required to provide both financial and operational information.

A Select List of contractors would then have been invited to tender for the whole of the Refuse & Recycling Services Contract - the service requirements and various options within the tender documents are priced within the overall bills of quantities.

All completed tenders would then have been evaluated and the award of contract would have taken into account the following criteria;

- Best Value
- Consistency with the Council's objectives
- The Contractor's proven technical ability
- Tender Price
- Innovative flair and partnership approach in taking advantage of new technology and working methods
- The Contractor's willingness to contribute towards environmental improvements
- The proposed method and quality of service delivery
- The sufficiency of staffing and other resources
- The Contractor's compliance with Tender documentation
- The Contractor's Health & Safety Statement and Record

For a contract of this value a minimum of 5 contractors would have been invited to tender.

The total contract value over 7 years is in the region of £9,000,000.00 (9 million) - The value of bulky waste collections over the same period is in the region of £160,000 and makes up a very small fraction of the overall contract."

Gary Stevenson