



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 27 November 2008

1. Present:

Daniel Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Grahame Bell (The Pantiles Traders' Association), June Bridgeman (Soroptimist International), George Carey (Tunbridge Wells Access Group), John Cunningham (Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society), Michael Doyle (Hawkenbury Village Association), Peter Gemmill (Albion Road Residents' Association), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), John Higgs (Hanover & Rock Villa Residents' Association), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Ian Naismith (Hanover & Rock Villa Residents' Association), Keith Perry (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Christopher Thomas (Chairman of the Town Forum, Woodbury Close Residents' Association), Alastair Tod (RTW Civic Society), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association) and Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association).

Councillors: Peter Crawford (Broadwater), Barry Edwards (Rusthall), Mrs Catherine Mayhew (Park), John Miller (Culverden), Mrs Tracy Moore (St John's), Leonard Price (Culverden), James Scholes (Pantiles & St Mark's) and Chris Woodward (St John's).

Others in attendance: Ailsa Paton, Community Safety Partnership/Town & Country Housing Group and Richard Powell, Director of Services to the Community.

2. Apologies:

Jenny Blackburn (Rusthall Village Association), Robin Hillier (Transition Tunbridge Wells), Michael Holman (TW Twinning and Friendship Association), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Simon Smith (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Users' Association), Samantha Timms (Senior Committee Administrator), David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association) and

Councillors: Ronan Basu (Culverden), Mrs Lesley Herriot (St John's), Frank Williams (Sherwood).

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

3. Membership Changes

None received.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting Dated 30 October 2008

The minutes were agreed, subject to the additions below:

Amendment to minute 4 'Membership Changes'

"The Access Group had become a member of the Town Forum and that George Carey was the representative of the Access Group.

James McGrath, who was a representative of Norfolk Grange, has left the Town Forum."

Amendment to minute 9 'Public Conveniences'

"June Bridgeman said that Soroptimist International surveys of public conveniences and other research had repeatedly highlighted the high importance people attached to having readily accessible clean public conveniences. Recent surveys by Network Rail and DisabledGo confirmed this. Research had also showed that the condition and design of public toilets directly influenced how shoppers and tourists judged the quality of a place.

Among the options offered, introducing charges was the preferable choice. The method of charging or of reconfiguring toilets must not however introduce any physical obstacles such as turnstiles. These caused great problems for pregnant women, those with young children, and those with shopping. SI would be strongly opposed to the introduction of unisex toilets."

Matters Arising:

Action 9.3 – Councillor Mrs Mayhew stated that the Select Committee were submitting reports to Cabinet on 2 December relating to a) Urban Parishing; b) Tourist Information Centre and c) Town Entry Signs.

She went on to say that Park Ward Councillors would be holding a surgery from January to coincide with Town Forum meetings and that the budget would be considered on 18 January, it was noted that it would be a tough year.

John Goodfellow asked for more information about the financial calculation so that the effect of Rusthall parishing could be assessed by the Town Forum. The Town Forum was reminded that Sean Clark, Head of Finance and Governance would be attending in January to talk about Special Expenses and issues about the Rusthall parishing could also be raised.

Action 10.1 – Christopher Thomas suggested that the Town Forum invite the Commons Conservators to a meeting to find out why the car park had been allowed in the first place – this was agreed.

Minute 11 – The Town Forum were concerned that full debate had not taken place in relation to the Town Forum's Champions; the Town Forum agreed that the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and proposed Champions have discussions and bring back to the Town Forum in January 2009 their suggestions. It was also agreed that other members of the Town Forum could contribute to the discussions by sending their suggestions to the Chairman.

4.1 That Sean Clark be asked to include Rusthall parishing calculations when he attends the Town Forum meeting in January 2009.

4.2 That discussions that place with the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Champions and their suggestions be submitted to the January meeting of the Forum. Other members wishing to submit suggestions to send them direct to Christopher Thomas.

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 Forum'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.

Action Outstanding from the Meeting dated 25 September 2008

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

Actions Completed from 30 October 2008 meeting:

- 7.1 That Phillip Whitbourn register to speak at the Western Area Planning Committee meeting due to take place on 12 November 2008 to express the Town Forum's views relating to the Cinema Site planning application.
- 8.1 That should any Town Forum member have any question(s) that they would like submitted to PFI hospital to send their question(s) to Christopher Thomas at christownforum@btinternet.com by 20 November 2008.
- 9.1 That Town Forum members taking the above into consideration and forward their views and suggestions direct to Richard Powell as soon as possible: richard.powell@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

6. Reports from Borough Councillors

Councillor Mrs Moore – The Town Forum was informed that St John's Trading Association had formed on 25 November 2008 and would be wishing to join the Town Forum.

She also stated that she and Councillor Woodward were also considering how to get a residents' association formed in the Silverdale Road area, it was also hoped that there would be one set up in the St John's ward soon.

Councillor Mrs Moore reported that she had been to local schools to encourage children to cycle to school, only 1-5% cycle, 30% go by car. There was a proposal from a group of residents to create an off-road cycle path on publically owned land which was parallel to Reynolds Lane; this would allow children to cycle safely and not on the roads – this had been supported by Greg Clark, MP. The length of the cycle path would be 1km long but would take bikes off the most dangerous stretch of the A26. She went on to say that she would be discussing this with Kent County Council. Councillor Mrs Moore concluded by saying that Conrad Froud had been invited to attend and speak on the cycleway presentation to the February meeting of the Town Forum.

June Bridgeman suggested that a similar scheme should be introduced in the Culverden Down area – Councillor Mrs Moore confirmed that Conrad Froud had further schemes for other areas in the town.

Councillor Crawford – Had received a letter from a constituent in Broadmead expressing concern that people working in Tunbridge Wells were using their roads to park in. There was a need for more parking.

7. Acknowledging the Work of the Town Forum

Town Forum members had previously agreed that Sheila Wheeler, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Chief Executive, should attend the November's meeting to provide a presentation on acknowledging the Town Forum's work with the Council. Unfortunately, Sheila was unable to attend, Richard Powell, Director of Services to the Community, attended and gave the presentation in Sheila's absence.

Richard stated that the Council had taken on board the need to improve how the Council responded to Consultees. This would be acknowledged in the new Consultation and Engagement Strategy. There was a plethora of consultations and perhaps a need to focus on the key items. Richard then identified how the Town Forum was shaping strategies – the Town Forum was making an impact – not least in its representation in key partnerships including Tunbridge Wells Together.

The Town Forum was given specific examples of how they had helped shape strategy, for instance, "Getting Around Tunbridge Wells" – this was endorsed by Joint Transportation Board in July 2008 and was further discussed in October, with specific proposals investigated for inclusion in the annual programme; and Public Conveniences Review – comments received from the Town Forum would be included in the report submitted to Cabinet.

The Town Forum asked where their energy should be focused; Richard said it was not up to the Council to tell the Town Forum what to do but he did give some suggestions as follows: ensuring that harder to reach groups are represented and reached; try to get more voice from youth; and make sure that the residents that the Town Forum represents are making their voices heard/receiving feedback.

The Town Forum noted that from April 2009, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will be looking intensively at the town centre development plans and would be engaging with the Town Forum, and others.

Highlighted to the Town Forum was the fact that the savings target for next year had now been revised to £1.25m. The recession was hitting income in all areas associated with development (planning fees, building control, land charges) and discretionary household spending (parking, theatre, leisure centres). It was noted that community effects are actively monitored such as unemployment, home repossessions, retail closures and that the Town Forum would be consulted regarding the budget strategy.

In concluding, Richard stated that a number of things were being looked forward to in the future, such as: the outcome of the CPA re-evaluation, which would be received in March 2009; the Royal Prefix Centenary would be in April 2009; and County Cricket and Mela were also taking place.

Richard thanked the Town Forum on behalf of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for their work which is appreciated.

The Town Forum thanked Richard for his attendance, his presentation and answering questions. The presentation is appended to these minutes for the Town Forum's information.

8. Domestic Abuse

Town Forum members had previously agreed that Ailsa Paton, Community Safety Partnership/Town and Country Housing Group, should attend the November's meeting. Ailsa attended and showed a short film created by local women at the YMCA in Risky Relationships, for the Town Forum's information.

She stated that young people were not heard as much so would be providing education and support to those people. Domestic abuse affects one in four women, and one in six men experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. 750,000 children are put on an 'at risk register' every year and three quarters of those children are witnessing domestic abuse.

Ailsa went on to say that there were many misperceptions about domestic abuse; domestic abuse is physical, emotional, mental and verbal and financial assault, not just physical violence, this had now been acknowledged by the Police. It affects Tunbridge Wells and all of society, geographical areas.

The Town Forum noted that domestic abuse was 16% of violent crime figures in the UK and in Tunbridge Wells, 22% of all violent crime were domestic abuse. 100 cases were reported to the Police in Tunbridge Wells every month and this was probably only a quarter of the domestic violence which was actually going on.

Ailsa offered to come back to talk to any residents' group or associations to bring awareness and that programmes now existed to help perpetrators address their problems as well as support for victims. She also stated that everyone at the Gateway should be trained about domestic abuse.

June Bridgeman suggested putting posters in public conveniences about the help available.

The Town Forum thanked Ailsa for her attendance, short film and answering questions.

9. Reports from the Vision Committee and Working Groups

Various Planning Matters – Philip Whitbourn updated the Town Forum on their recent meeting. Various matters arose:

Cinema Site – Philip had attended and spoke at the Western Area Planning Committee dated 12 November and had mentioned the unease felt about the rather ‘square’ design and that along side the discussion about the legal agreement, advantage should be taken of any time to try to secure improvements to the appearance of the development. The Committee after lengthy debate agreed the design subject to conditions.

Overview and Scrutiny Working Group – Philip and John Goodfellow attended a meeting of the Road Safety and Transportation Working Group on 13 November. It was noted that they sought to change Councillor Ransley’s perception of the Town Forum and to respond to his assertions that ‘there was no particular problems faced by pedestrians in the centre of the town’. It was agreed that the working group would provide Councillor Ransley with examples of places that pedestrians find awkward, such as Carrs Corner and Vale Road, together with pictures of badly patched pavements.

Meeting with Planning Officers – The next liaison meeting with himself, Daniel Bech, Jim Kehoe and Robert Cottrill was due to take place on 3 December. Numerous topics would be raised, such as: the position regarding the Council’s Development Partner, the position of the new Master Plan for Royal Tunbridge Wells, progress on the new Local Development Framework etc.

The Pantiles and The Common – It was expected that there would be a meeting with Targetfollow on 3 December. Car parking on the Fairground Site, and a possible new hotel on the Sale Room Site would probably be under discussion.

Former Petrol Station, London Road – A planning application had been submitted; the proposal was for a new development, with retail use on the ground floor and part of the basement together with offices on the first floor. Philip suggested that a small working group be convened to study the plans and to draft observations on the scheme – this was agreed by the Town Forum.

9.1 That a small working party be convened to study the plans and to draft observations on the scheme for the former petrol station on London Road.

Vision and Arts Committee – No matters arising.

Transport Matters – John Goodfellow updated the Town Forum on various matters relating to transport, as follows:

TWBC Working Party on Road Safety and Transport – The Council’s Local Economy and Housing Select Committee had chosen Road Safety and Transport as a concern of the public. A Working Party was established and consisted of Councillors Ransley, Neve and Holden, with aims to produce a report for the Select Committee to present to Cabinet early next year.

Philip Whitbourn and John Goodfellow met the Working Party and were able to advise them on the potential prospects and usefulness of a re-connected railway from Tunbridge Wells to Lewes, with considerable Park and Rail possibilities. Attention was then drawn to the chronic on-street parking situation in much of Tunbridge Wells which was intensifying year by year. The provision of an upper parking deck over part of Sainsbury’s large surface car park could be the most cost-effective provision, especially if the railway could be re-connected from the central Tunbridge Wells station to the West Station so trains could start there – the Working Party was urged to support this.

Park and Ride – The Town Forum noted that the review by Councillor Ransley dismisses Park and Ride as costly failures elsewhere and pointed out that no supporting information was given by the Town Forum in their ‘Getting Around Tunbridge Wells’ document. John stated that Maidstone’s Park and Ride had been running successfully for around 10 years and a report on it should be sought from Maidstone. However, there does not appear to be a realistic case for a Park and Ride in

Tunbridge Wells; firstly suitable and available sites needed to be identified. John asked for any Town Forum member interested in pursuing the provision of Park and Ride to advise the Town Forum about any such sites.

Pedestrianisation around Fiveways – John reported that no comments had been received to date on his report to the Town Forum on the effect of closing the Gateway to all traffic. The Town Forum agreed that a working party be convened to consider the treatment of the whole Fiveways area.

Speed Limits on Royal Tunbridge Wells Roads – The Town Forum noted that Kent Highway Services were currently considering speed limits on all A and B roads in the Borough. Pembury Road was being considered and it would be likely that the 30mph limit would be extended to beyond the junction with Sandhurst Road. Two residents associations in the Town Forum had asked for Forest Road and Benhall Mill Road both with 40mph limits to be included in the study, seeking a reduction to 30mph.

Pavements Surfaced with Black Tarmac – Pavements along Farmcombe Road were the latest victim of dead black tarmac finishing by Kent Highways. The disappointed residents were told it was established Kent policy but no written confirmation was forthcoming. Town Forum members were asked to inform of similar concerns about the inappropriate use of black tarmac instead of a more pleasant surface finish.

9.2 That a working party be convened to consider the whole Fiveways area.

9.3 That Town Forum members inform of any suitable and available Park and Ride sites.

9.4 That any other Town Forum member having concerns about the inappropriate use of black tarmac by Kent Highway Services to replace pavements or elsewhere to contact John Goodfellow or the Town Forum.

10. Any other business – None.

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

- Thursday 18 December 2008 at 7.30pm
- 29 January 2009 at 7.30pm
– Sean Clark, Head of Finance and Governance in attendance to advise on the Council's Budget and Special Expenses.
- 26 February 2009 at 7.30pm
– Presentation on Cycle Ways
- 26 March 2009 at 7.30pm
- 30 April 2009 at 7.30pm

18 December 2008 is the next full Town Forum - Any reports/short papers to be emailed/posted to Samantha Timms by no later than 10am on Monday 8 December 2008.

12. The meeting closed at: 9.40pm