



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM – EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

Thursday 29 May 2014

Attended: Sally Balcon, David Barnett, Mark Booker, Stephen Bowser, June Bridgeman, David Bushell (sub), Cllr Ben Chapelard, Adrian Cory, John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Helen Featherstone, Allan Gooda, Michaela van Halewyn, Tim Harper, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Sue Kaner, Kyrios Kyriacou, George Lawson (sub), Katharina Mahler-Bech, Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew, Chris Morris, David Morris, Marguerita Morton, Altan Omer, Nick Pope, Alastair Tod and David Wakefield (Chairman)

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Democratic and Engagement Manager), Gary Stevenson (Head of Environment and Street Scene) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Léonie Harrington and Cllr Paul Barrington-King (Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Sustainability)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Lorna Blackmore, Jane Fenwick, John Forster, Angela Phillips, Peter Taylor, Mary Wardrop, Victor Webb, Philip Whitbourn and Cllrs Bob Backhouse, Peter Bulman, David Neve, James Scholes and David Scott.

2. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE TOWN FORUM'S CONSTITUTION

The Chairman, David Wakefield, introduced a report, which explained how the Town Forum's Management Committee had met to consider how minor changes to the Forum's Constitution might encourage more nominations to come forward for the key roles of Chairman and the two Vice-Chairmen positions.

The principal amendment set out in the agenda papers was to propose that the Chairman should be elected from amongst all member organisation representatives, rather than from the narrower field of resident association delegates.

The opportunity had also been taken to suggest a few other, minor, amendments, to reflect the actual working arrangements of the Forum's Management Committee.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the proposals had been agreed at the 20 March Town Forum meeting, where 'in principle' approval had been given. A formal decision on this proposed change could only be made at an Annual General Meeting or an Extraordinary General Meeting, in order to meet the requirements of the Town Forum's Constitution, it was noted.

It was also noted that, as the Town Forum was half-way through the year, it was appropriate for the current Chairman, David Wakefield, to remain in post until the AGM in November, at which a replacement nomination – or nominations – would be considered.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the schedule of proposed amendments to the Constitution, as set out in the agenda, be approved; and
- (2) That David Wakefield be formally appointed to continue to serve as Chairman until the date of the AGM, namely 27 November 2014.

The meeting concluded at 6.37pm.



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2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary, TWBC's Democratic Services Officer, reported that the Management Committee of the Town Forum had approved an application from the Tunbridge Wells Business Forum to become members; their representative, Allan Gooda, was welcomed to his first meeting.

In addition, it was reported that Nick Pope had been appointed as the named representative for the Friends of Calverley Grounds, in place of Jim Kedge. Mr Pope was welcomed to his first meeting.

Finally, Mr McGeary advised that, as a result of the Borough Council elections held on 22 May, newly-elected Councillors Nasir Jamil and Don Sloan would become members of the Town Forum, in place of Trevor Poile and Len Price.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2014 were presented.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2014 be agreed.

4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

20 March 2014

4 Evidence of formal appointment to the Town Forum

MMcG Representatives to submit evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum.

Mike McGeary, TWBC Democratic Services Officer, advised that the position remained that 22 out of the 37 active representative organisations had now submitted evidence of their formal appointment to the Town Forum. The Chairman reiterated once more the importance of submitting this information, in the interests of good governance.

5. FIVE WAYS PUBLIC REALM – PROGRESS REPORT

Cllr Paul Barrington-King, Cabinet Portfolio-holder for Sustainability, provided an update report on this TWBC initiative. He started by thanking Alastair Tod and John Forster for their significant input into the progress made with this scheme.

Cllr Barrington-King advised that a meeting had been held with Colin Shorter from Amey, KCC's appointed contractor for highway schemes, to discuss the materials to be used in Five Ways. He emphasised the importance of maintaining a distinctive 'Tunbridge Wells' appearance in terms of the type and colour used. At the meeting with Mr Shorter, a shortlist of three colour schemes had been agreed, Cllr Barrington-King added.

Gary Stevenson, TWBC's Head of Environment and Street Scene, advised that the carriageway running through the centre of the scheme would consist of a granite block. He added that the working group, of which Messrs Tod and Forster were members, would next examine a blending of the surfaces, with Marshalls – the suppliers – making up samples of the three different colour options, for viewing in both dry and wet conditions.

Mr Stevenson reported on other aspects of the scheme which were being examined, including: street furniture (seating as well as low level 'feature' lighting); layout changes (taxi ranks, disabled bays); the bus stop layout (to achieve an improved spread of people); the hours of restricted use by authorised vehicles through the scheme; and the storage bin areas used by Pret à Manger and Bills.

Members of the Town Forum raised the following issues:

- June Bridgeman stressed the importance of proper **signage** for drivers, particularly from the aspect of those who might be unfamiliar with the local road network, to ensure compliance with the restricted use through the scheme. She also sought reassurance that, unlike in the past, she felt, any subsequent repairs to the block surface were carried out to the proper standard. Cllr Barrington-King provided the reassurance sought, adding that the road signage would achieve the required action by drivers and that the sourcing of replacement surfaces would be guaranteed by Marshalls for at least 30 years;
- Alastair Tod believed that the **storage bin** issue relating to Pret à Manger was best dealt with by enforcing their planning conditions, one of which required their storage bins to be kept out of view behind a wall;
- Cllr Barrington-King reiterated the intention to build upon the 'Wiesbaden' **cycle racks** in the town centre; in response to a question from Dorothea Holman, Cllr Barrington-King confirmed that some smaller versions of the existing rack would be incorporated into the scheme;
- Michael Holman enquired about the Millennium Clock area. He asked at what point water and electricity supplies might be installed in this area, to accommodate a future **water feature**. Mr Stevenson advised that the Clock

itself would remain in situ for this phase of the work, with a tidying up of its plinth being carried out. He reported that this phase of the scheme would also include how best to provide the water and electricity supplies for a future water feature, adding that work would start in August and be completed in early December;

- Helen Featherstone emphasised the importance of installing surfaces that did not become dangerous for pedestrians when wet or icy conditions were present. Mr Stevenson acknowledged that fact and reassured Mrs Featherstone that this would be part of the criteria for selecting the correct paving;
- The Chairman, David Wakefield, welcomed the shared space initiative for the town centre. David Morris, on behalf of the Over Fifties Forum, said that shared space areas in general were not felt to provide a friendly environment for older people.

In summing up, Cllr Barrington-King emphasised how important it had been with this proposal that full consultation with all interested and affected parties had taken place. He also acknowledged the boost given to the initiative by the all-party support shown on the Borough Council.

There were no specific action points arising from this update report.

6. UPDATE REPORT FROM TWBC'S CABINET

Cllr Barrington-King provided an update on some key issues which had come before TWBC's Cabinet or were other items of general interest, as follows:

- (a) TWBC's Five Year Plan** – which had been approved by the full Council in April, taking account of many of the comments made during the consultation stage. Cllr Barrington-King drew attention to the Plan's acknowledgement of the Borough's 'many important and knowledgeable forums, associations, groups and individuals' and the fact that the Leader of the Council 'wants to use this expertise' in bringing about the improvements set out;
- (b) Cinema site** – Cllr Barrington-King advised that there was now a clear timetable in place for the demolition of the cinema, which would start on 30 June and which was scheduled for completion by 17 October. He added that, while there was disappointment that the site owners had been unable to secure a deal with Waitrose for the future use of the site, the Leader of the Council and Greg Clark MP were remaining active in finding a solution. Also related to this same site, Cllr Barrington-King reported that TWBC had reached agreement with the current site owners over outstanding business rates. Liability orders issued by the court meant that a sum of £464,638 would be payable by 31 August;
- (c) TWBC Annual Meeting** – taking place on 11 June, with Councillors Stanyer and Elliott due to be appointed as Mayor and Deputy Mayor, respectively, for 2014/15;
- (d) Cycling initiative** – Cllr Barrington-King advised that 'Cycling Friday' was being launched on 6 June, with a central theme of encouraging residents routinely to cycle each Friday in place of their normal mode of transport. The activities taking place on launch day were, it was noted, for all age groups;
- (e) Railway bridge, Mount Pleasant Road** – Cllr Barrington-King was pleased to advise that, as a result of some effective collaborative work, which included the involvement of Greg Clark MP, all the necessary approvals and funding had now

been obtained for the repainting of the railway bridge at the foot of Mount Pleasant Road;

- (f) **Litter enforcement campaign** – Cllr Barrington-King reported on his recent tv and radio interviews on this issue. He added that TWBC had always applied a ‘zero tolerance’ approach to litter enforcement. This position would be reinforced by proposals for a six-month pilot initiative to deploy a team of officers to focus on ‘hot spots’ in the Borough and impose £80 fines, if offenders were observed in the act of dropping litter.

Town Forum members raised the following issues in response to the update report given:

- Katharina Mahler-Bech enquired who the contact person was, in the event of litter enforcement. She was advised that the Street Scene Team Leader, Edwin Burgess, should be contacted;
- Marguerita Morton welcomed the additional resources being employed to enforce litter control. She advised that her own road was regularly littered with food wrapping etc, suspected to be from pupils of the nearby Boys’ Grammar School.

Dorothea Holman suggested that making the Head Teacher of the school aware of this problem might bring about an improvement or, if the source of the problem lies elsewhere, the school might provide some help in occasional litter-picks. Mrs Holman was keen to publicise the enforcement of the dog fouling aspect of this initiative, adding that she intended to place a suitably-worded article in her residents’ association newsletter.

Mr Stevenson welcomed any local or peer pressure which could be applied, adding that he would happily provide a suitable form of words for those who wished to promote the TWBC initiative. Cllr Barrington-King added that TWBC had worked very effectively with local schools in the past on raising awareness of previous litter enforcement campaigns.

Sue Kaner requested that Camden Road be included as part of this latest pilot, on the basis of its litter problem. Cllr Barrington-King thanked Mrs Kaner for the recommendation, adding that ‘local intelligence’ of this type was important. He asked Mrs Kaner to make direct contact with TWBC’s Street Scene Team Leader, Edwin Burgess, to advise him of the particular problem parts of Camden Road.

Mark Booker was aware that local authorities often attached small official notices to lamp posts etc, warning of the consequences of dropping litter and allowing dogs to foul pavements. He asked whether greater use could be made of these. He also felt that open-top litter bins enabled urban foxes to empty the contents onto the street and asked whether thought had been given to replacing such bins with lidded tops. Mr Stevenson advised that, while no consideration had been given to providing lidded bins, it was an aspect which could be examined at the time when replacement bins were necessary.

June Bridgeman enquired whether the prevention of dog fouling could be enforced in areas such as Woodbury Park Cemetery; Mr Stevenson responded by saying that he would examine whether such enforcement controls were already in place. The Chairman suggested that existing bye-laws might provide the necessary answer.

In summing up, the Chairman of the Town Forum welcomed the report and thanked Cllr Barrington-King for his update report.

RESOLVED – Gary Stevenson to: (a) provide suggested wording for residents' associations wishing to raise awareness of TWBC's latest litter/dog fouling enforcement initiative; and (b) research whether TWBC's enforcement powers exist in areas such as Woodbury Park Cemetery.

7. STREET CLEANING IN TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Further to the discussion on this at the previous meeting, Mr Stevenson reported back on the action taken to address the concerns raised by the Boyne Park Residents' Association, which had led to a much-improved outcome.

Dorothea Holman, who had raised this matter, thanked TWBC for its positive response. She felt that there were still some further improvements in the street cleansing process which could be made, namely if the contractor, Cory, could provide 'no parking' signs in all four streets within the Boyne Park Residents' Association area; she added that the process would be even more effective if the wording of the notices could indicate a greater degree of compulsion required on the part of residents not to park, to allow thorough cleansing to take place. Mrs Holman also enquired what the frequency was of the street cleansing regime in town centre roads.

In noting the success of the extra effort made in respect of the Boyne Park area, George Lawson felt that for his road – Inner London Road – it would be a very difficult process to be able to make contact with all of the residents, in order to achieve full access for the contractor.

On the matter of the frequency of the service, Mr Stevenson advised that there was a full schedule in place but that there was no uniform period across the whole of the town centre. In terms of what the service provided, he advised that this included a mechanical sweep and a litter 'pick', together with a seasonal 'leaf drop' collection.

Katharina Mahler-Bech asked whether the service included pavement cleansing machinery. Mr Stevenson confirmed this was the case, adding that this was not, however, provided on a regular basis.

June Bridgeman turned to the drain/gully emptying contract, which was a KCC responsibility. She felt that this could be much more comprehensive if there were markings on the highway around each gully, preventing car parking and thereby providing easy access for the contractor's vehicle. Léonie Harrington said that she would take this suggestion back to the relevant contract manager at KCC and advise on the outcome in due course.

Léonie Harrington referred to paragraph (11) of the report accompanying the agenda. She advised that the schedule of gully emptying was currently under review, adding that she would speak to the Drainage and Flood Manager and circulate the updated details, as soon as these were known.

Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew felt that some gullies were filling up because of the leaf-drop from over-hanging trees and hedges of gardens adjoining the highway. She asked what the guidelines were in terms of householders maintaining boundary trees and hedges, to ensure that over-hanging vegetation did not add to the gully cleansing problem. Cllr Mrs Mayhew added that, on some occasions, when over-hanging vegetation was raised as an issue by one of her electorate, it was often impossible to identify which property it related to, making corrective action more difficult.

Léonie Harrington advised that it was not always necessary to identify the offending property owner, adding that when over-hanging vegetation was being reported to KCC, it was sufficient to provide merely as much information about the location as was known, to enable the inspection team to identify where the problem existed. Léonie Harrington added that she would attempt to find out what the householder's responsibility was in terms of the maintenance of boundary trees and hedges, to ensure that over-hanging vegetation did not become a problem.

David Morris advised that he found it a difficult process to obtain a response from KCC when he complained about over-hanging vegetation. Cllr Mrs Mayhew advised that, by contrast, she had been able to easily log all problems brought to her attention; she added that, if Mr Morris continued to experience difficulties, he might wish to contact his local county councillor, to take up the issue.

Mr Stevenson was thanked for his update and feedback report.

RESOLVED – That Léonie Harrington research: (a) the feasibility of the suggestion made by June Bridgeman for hatched road markings around gullies, to help provide access for emptying; and (b) what the householder responsibility was in terms of over-hanging vegetation, and report back to Town Forum members.

8. WORKING GROUPS

Update reports were made from the working groups as follows:

Water in the Wells Working Group – The Chairman, Michael Holman, reported on the following progress:

- (a) **Awareness and support** – During the past six months, the members of the Water in the Wells Working Group had noted a growing awareness of its aims and objectives. In particular, Mr Holman added, the political support given and the help with finding external sponsors were both warmly welcomed.
- (b) **Longfield Road, North Farm** – Mr Holman thanked Cllrs Barrington-King and Scott and Greg Clark MP for raising the issue of possible water features forming part of this highway scheme. Mr Holman emphasised the importance of having suitable ducting (for water and electricity) in place at a very early stage, if this proposal were to be realised. He added that Cllr Scott was continuing to press for a successful outcome which, if achievable, would see features at the four new roundabouts and at the A21 gyratory junction;
- (c) **Union House, Pantiles** – Mr Holman reminded Forum members that this building was currently on the market, adding that it had been identified by TWBC in the Site Allocations DPD as an 'area of change'; he reported that all potential developers of the site had been advised of the need to include a water feature and some public art in their proposals;
- (d) **Five Ways** – Mr Holman advised that the Water in the Wells Working Group had acknowledged the need to work closely with the owners of the RVP shopping centre in stressing the importance of a water feature on the Five Ways site;
- (e) **Royal Wells Park** – Mr Holman reported that Berkeley Homes appeared still to be committed to the provision of two levels of water feature on this former K&S Hospital site. He urged anyone with any influence with Berkeley to press them in delivering on their commitment;

- (f) **Cinema site** – On hearing that the demolition of this building would begin at the end of June, Mr Holman enquired what would happen beyond that. Because of its unique location, Mr Holman felt that the site was ideal for a water feature, which would provide a prominent link to other such features in the town centre;
- (g) **Chalybeate spring** – Mr Holman advised that the Chalybeate spring was temporarily closed, due to a ‘reduced water flow’ which, he added, was in marked contrast to Grosvenor and Hilbert Park.

In summing up, Mr Holman stressed that, for a water feature scheme to succeed, it was of great importance that it was incorporated into key strategic documents of the Borough Council or in Section 106 planning agreements, for instance. He added that the ambitions of the Water in the Wells Working Group could only be realised if they continued to have the full support of senior TWBC politicians and officers.

In response, the Town Forum Chairman, David Wakefield, expressed particular support for the Longfield Road proposal, in view of its prominent, ‘gateway’ location. He urged the Town Forum councillors to use whatever influence they had to help deliver this scheme.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group – June Bridgeman, Chairman of this working group, referred to the earlier comment made by Cllr Barrington-King about the importance that TWBC attached to the use of ‘expertise’ that existed in the Borough, in achieving improvements for its residents. With this in mind, Mrs Bridgeman advised that her group was forging closer links with various ‘Friends of’ groups, in order to progress the town’s ‘green infrastructure’ initiatives. She added that Mark Booker had prepared a scoping report for discussion with the ‘Friends of’ groups, focusing on the town’s green spaces, what connects them and how could the various groups bring about the improvements envisaged in TWBC’s Green Infrastructure Plan. It was noted that maps would be produced in the Autumn to add some graphical detail to the narrative.

Mrs Bridgeman also reported on the following:

Destination Management Plan – Mrs Bridgeman reported on the inaugural meeting of the steering group established by TWBC to help deliver this plan. She emphasised the importance, she felt, of the group maintaining strong leadership in order to ensure the initiative achieved its goals;

Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery – Mrs Bridgeman advised that a new ‘friends’ group was being launched for the Tunbridge Wells Cemetery, with an exhibition and guided history and nature walk taking place on Saturday 7 June. She asked that interested parties come along and take part and support the new group;

Cultural Hub – Mrs Bridgeman expressed concern that the detailed plans for the Cultural Hub were being developed by TWBC without the opportunity for interested groups such as the Town Forum being able to express their own ideas.

Adam Chalmers, the Democratic and Engagement Manager, advised that the process involved inviting expressions of interest, which would include a consultation element. Michael Holman felt that there would be a lot to be gained as this process developed through using the wide range of expertise that existed beyond just TWBC. He asked about the timescale for the ‘expressions of interest’ aspect and at what stage the Town Forum could input their views. Mr Chalmers advised that he would discuss these points with the lead officer concerned and feed back the outcome.

Cllr Mrs Mayhew urged that the views of younger people be sought on the detailed plans for the Hub, on the basis that they would be key users of the service in its educational function – and beyond. Helen Featherstone believed that school head teachers were another important consultation group.

Dorothea Holman emphasised the importance of learning from the experiences of other cultural hub providers, in order to ensure the end product appealed to as wide a range of residents and visitors as possible.

Finally, in respect of the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group, Sally Balcon reported on the production of leaflets, detailing walking trails across Tunbridge Wells Common, some examples of which she tabled.

RESOLVED – (1) That Adam Chalmers report back on the Cultural Hub ‘expressions of interest’ process; and (2) That the update report be noted.

Traffic Strategy Working Group –

Sally Balcon spoke on behalf of this group. She advised on the following issues:

- (a) **Joint Transportation Board** – Members of the working group had attended the meeting of the JTB on 28 April and TWBC’s Public Transport Forum on 26 March, in order to maintain their ‘watching brief’ on TWBC and KCC highways-related matters;
- (b) **Gatwick Airport expansion consultation** – Mrs Balcon and Jane Fenwick had visited an exhibition on this issue, held in Edenbridge on 2 May, where the three options for a second runway at Gatwick had been set out. Mrs Balcon added that, while Tunbridge Wells had not been included in the consultation process, it was clear that its residents may be considerably affected by any increased air traffic. She added that negotiations on the flight paths for each option were continuing;
- (c) **Hospital bus service** – Members were advised that Peter Perry was continuing work to improve the marketing of the very welcome, but under-used, bus service to Pembury Hospital;
- (d) **Carrs Corner** – Mrs Balcon reported that Peter Perry had raised the issue of unsightly weeds growing in the centre of this new roundabout; he had also noted that the new road surface might be disturbed by gas main works, she added.

Cllr Mrs Mayhew responded on the **aircraft noise** issue. In her capacity as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Mrs Mayhew explained that KCC’s representative on GATCOM (Gatwick Airport Consultative Committee) was County Councillor Matthew Balfour. She added that, as far as she could ascertain, TWBC had never been asked for its views on the airport’s possible expansion. However, she added that she was ensuring that the Borough Council’s current views were being made known to KCC, as clearly as possible.

Cllr Mrs Mayhew cautioned that this was a complicated scenario, as KCC’s strategic position was that they supported the expansion of Gatwick Airport. So she felt it important to be pragmatic about what TWBC could realistically achieve, starting with monitoring the noise effects on the part of the Borough most affected, namely Speldhurst parish. She added that there was already some respite which had been achieved, in the curbing of night flights in the area. Other specific aims might be to seek a total night-time flight ban across the Borough or seeking a change in the angle of aircraft descent, which would deliver some benefit for residents, it was noted.

Cllr Mrs Mayhew advised that a public meeting had been convened for Tuesday 17 June in the Town Hall, where residents' concerns could be discussed. She added that Gatwick Airport did offer a website service where complaints about aircraft noise could be logged.

Mark Booker reported that he had attended a consultation meeting in Crowborough on this same issue, where he learnt that it should be possible to devise a flight path which would avoid densely-populated areas but the consequence was to 'inflict pain' on sparsely-populated rural settlements. He added that, when aircraft flying altitudes were mentioned, this related to their height above sea level, which did not take account of elevated land.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the progress report be accepted; and
- (2) That Mike McGeary circulate details of the public meeting being held on 17 June about concerns over aircraft noise.

Planning and Development Strategy – Michael Doyle, Chairman of this working group, reported on the following issues:

- (a) **Land Registry site** – Mr Doyle reported that, at the previous day's Planning Committee meeting, it had been decided to approve an application made by AXA/PPP Healthcare, not to install a parking deck, which would have provided additional on-site parking for staff. Mr Doyle advised that he was concerned about the effects this would have on resident parking in Hawkenbury, adding that he did not feel that the issue should have been treated merely as an amendment to an existing planning consent;
- (b) **Site Allocations process** – Mr Doyle had appended an update report to the agenda, which explained how two recent court decisions had impacted on the approach being taken by many councils in respect of their site allocations process. He added that the view being taken by TWBC was to continue with its work in producing a 'submission' version of the Development Plan Document, pending further clarity on the legal position.

Cllr Mrs Mayhew drew attention to paragraph (1) in the update report, which referred to a recent planning appeal decision relating to Fowlers Park in Hawkhurst, which had found in TWBC's favour; this had dealt with the issue of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and housing needs. Cllr Mrs Mayhew recommended that the planning inspector's acceptance of the Borough Council's position was an aspect which the Town Forum would be well-advised to take note of and to fully endorse.

Mark Booker picked up on this theme; he advised that an important footnote (No. 9) in the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) document clearly indicated that "... development should be restricted ..." within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Green Belt land. He felt that this element of the NPPF should be widely publicised.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be accepted.

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield, Chairman of this working group, advised that there were no additional items to report from within his working group's remit.

9. INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

Adam Chalmers, TWBC's Democratic and Engagement Manager, tabled a report, which explained the main aspects of a national change to the electoral registration process. Mr Chalmers advised that, starting in June, the system would move away from household-based registration to individuals having responsibility. He added that, in the vast majority of cases, no action would be necessary on the part of most people, as they would be transferred automatically to the new register and be advised by letter that this had taken place.

Members of the Town Forum raised the following questions and points:

- David Morris enquired as to what action would be taken against those who chose not to register. How would it be enforced, he asked. Mr Chalmers advised that the rate of non-registration under the current process was already an issue and that the same sanctions would apply under the new arrangements. He added that the authority had always taken an active role in promoting the importance of electoral registration;
- Stephen Bowser asked how the new system would be any better at preventing fraud. He felt, for instance, that there was nothing to stop an individual saying that they were resident at any particular address, and a lawful householder would not know that such registration had taken place. Mr Chalmers advised that the new system would still include an annual canvass of households, to minimise the prospect of fraud in the way described by Mr Bowser. He added that, to strengthen the process, the authority would be writing to all owners of empty and second home properties.

On a related issue, Cllr Mrs Mayhew advised that her Overview and Scrutiny Committee would soon be examining a recent full Council motion on the feasibility of reducing the number of Borough councillors. As part of the process, a working group would be established to examine the details of how this might be achieved; Cllr Mrs Mayhew added that she would welcome the views of residents across the Borough on this topic.

Cllr Mrs Mayhew advised that it was important for those who had an active interest in this subject to have a good understanding of the background and the impact of a reduction in numbers, adding that she would be happy to return to a subsequent meeting of the Town Forum to discuss this in greater detail.

The Chairman, David Wakefield, reported that his working group had previously recommended that TWBC should look to reduce the number of councillors, but he acknowledged that it was a complicated matter and that, while there might be cost savings overall, there were also consequences that had to be fully understood.

RESOLVED – That the explanation on the new Individual Electoral Registration system be noted.

10. TWBC CONSULTATION ISSUES

Mike McGeary, TWBC's Democratic Services Officer, introduced an extract from the latest version of TWBC's Forward Plan, in which he drew attention to issues of general interest to the Town Forum which were being considered by the Cabinet in the coming months. It was presented for information only.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Fracking – Marguerita Morton enquired whether TWBC was aware of any applications for the exploration of gas reserves through fracking within the Borough. Adam Chalmers advised that any such applications would be made to KCC, adding that he was unaware of any to date. Mr Chalmers said that he would check on the up-to-date situation and report back to Mrs Morton.

RESOLVED – That Mr Chalmers check whether there have been any applications for fracking to take place within the Borough and report back to Mrs Morton.

(b) Parks maintenance – Sue Kaner, on behalf of the Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, advised on a recent meeting held with the contractors for parks maintenance, Sodexo. She said that there was a great deal of concern amongst the Friends group over alleged failure by Sodexo to comply with their contractual maintenance commitments, such as water course culverts, play equipment etc. Mrs Kaner felt this would also have an adverse effect on the HLF bid for a major refurbishment scheme.

As for the wider parks maintenance contract, June Bridgeman advised that Sodexo were responsible for the maintenance of the two cemeteries. She added that there were often occasions when the contractor had to be asked to address a maintenance issue, especially at Woodbury Park Cemetery.

In response, Adam Chalmers advised that the action taken by the Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, in drawing Sodexo's alleged failings to the attention of Peter Every, TWBC's Parks and Sports Team Leader, was the correct course to follow. He added that he would raise this matter with Mr Every and report back to Mrs Kaner.

RESOLVED – That Mr Chalmers raise these concerns with TWBC's Parks and Sports Team Leader and report back to Mrs Kaner on his findings.

(c) Events for 2014 anniversaries – Michael Holman summarised some of the key events taking place as part of the 'year of anniversaries', specifically those related to the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Twinning Charter with Wiesbaden. These included:

- (i) a Town Hall cricket team travelling to play two matches in Germany;
- (ii) the 'Blazing Saddles' cyclists riding to Wiesbaden, being met at the German border by their counterparts from our twinned city;
- (iii) a number of free concerts being given by Wiesbaden's Symphonic Brass Ensemble when they visit in July;
- (iv) Wiesbaden's Lord Mayor visiting Tunbridge Wells in late July; and
- (v) an official return visit to Wiesbaden by the TWBC Mayor and Mayoress, accompanied by William Benson (Chief Executive) and Cllr Jane March (Portfolio-holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development) from 19-22 September. Mr Holman added that a small group of members of the Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association would also be travelling to Wiesbaden at this time, to support the official ceremonies taking place.

Mr Holman encouraged Town Forum members to support as many of these events as possible, as part of the year of celebrations.

(d) Dr Philip Whitbourn – June Bridgeman advised that Dr Philip Whitbourn was currently in hospital, having undergone major heart surgery. Town Forum members joined Mrs Bridgeman in wishing Dr Whitbourn a full and speedy recovery, the Chairman adding that he would send a letter expressing the Forum's best wishes.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 10 July 2014 at 6.30pm

Subsequent meetings:

25 September and 27 November (including the AGM)

The meeting concluded at 8.30pm.