



ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Minutes of Meeting dated Thursday 30 July 2009

1. Present:

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), John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association), John Higgs (Hanover and Rock Villa Residents' Association), Jonathan Hodge (Beulah Road Residents' Association, substitute for Stuart Anderson), George Lawson (Inner London Road Residents' Association), Ian Naismith (Hanover and Rock Villa Residents' Association), Altan Omer (Benhall Mill Road Land Association), Peter Perry (Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association), Christopher Thomas (The Chairman of the Town Forum and The Goodwins No's 1 & 2 Residents' Company/Woodbury Close Residents' Association), Alastair Tod (RTW Civic Society), Mary Wardrop (Hawkenbury Village Association).

RTW Ward Councillors: Councillors Robert Atwood (Rusthall), Ronen Basu (Culverden), Peter Bulman (Park), Mrs Lesley Herriot (St John's), John Miller (Culverden), Leonard Price (Culverden), Frank Williams (Sherwood), Chris Woodward (St John's).

Further Councillors in attendance: Paul Barrington-King (Portfolio-holder Sustainability), Roy Bullock (Leader of the Council), Dr Linda Hall (Heritage Champion - Borough's Eastern Area), Mrs Elizabeth Thomas (Portfolio-holder Planning and Economic Development) and Mike Rusbridge (Heritage Champion - Borough's Western Area).

Others in attendance: Lene Beynon (Borough's Highways Engineer), Alan Legg (Principal Design and Heritage Officer), Katharina Mahler (Telephone House Neighbours' Association) Gary Stevenson (Head of Environment and Street Scene), Samantha Timms (Senior Committee Administrator), Philip Whitbourn (private resident) and Simon Wilshaw (Tunbridge Wells Neighbourhood Police).

2. Apologies:

Stuart Anderson (Beulah Road Residents' Association), Councillor Crawford (Vice-Chairman), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association), Arthur Hutchins (4 Roads Residents' Association), Michael Larsen (Friends of the Grove), Councillors Mrs Catherine Mayhew, Mrs Tracy Moore and Scholes, Kate Sergeant (Clarence Road Users' Association), Simon Smith (Inner London Road Residents' Association), David Stocker (4 Roads Residents' Association) and David Webster (Clarence Road Users' Association).

Apologies received from individuals invited to this meeting only:

Nigel Bolton (Head of Leisure and Wellbeing), David Candlin (Head of Economic and Regeneration), Kent County Councillors Nick Chard (County Portfolio Holder for Highways) and John Davies (KCC Chairman), Brian Hayward (Senior Design and Heritage Officer), Daryl Jones (Economic Development and Business Liaison Officer), John Kaye (Principal Conservation Officer), Jim Kehoe (Head of Planning Services), Kent Highway Services, Andrew Taylor (Development Control Manager), Juliet Steinmetz (Marketing and Tourism Officer), Diane Webster (Tunbridge Wells Neighbourhood Police) and Martin Wilson (Kent Police).

(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 29 June 2009

The minutes were agreed, subject to the following amendment:

- ***Amendment to minute 1 'Present':***

Add John Goodfellow (Banner Farm Residents' Association) to the present list.

- ***Amendment to minute 8 'Start Future Dates of Town Forum Meetings 2010', Action point (1):***

Change 29 June 2010 to read '24 June 2010'.

Change 29 September 2010 to read '30 September 2010'.

- ***Amendment to minute 10 'Any Other Business, John Davies, Chairman, Kent County Council (KCC), gives update to the Town Forum', third paragraph up from the bottom, last sentence and fourth sentence up from the bottom:***

The word 'Borough' should be replaced with 'County'.

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 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.

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 Forum'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 Completed from 26 March 2009 meeting:

- 8.1 John Goodfellow to update the Town Forum at their next meeting on the outcome of the Select Committee's meeting dated 6 April.

This action point is cleared by virtue of fact that the Local Economic and Housing Select Committee minutes of the meeting of 9 April 2009 are published on the Council website. **ACTION CLEARED**

Actions Completed from 29 June 2009 meeting:

- 7.1 Should any Town Forum member have an idea for inclusion in the presentation, to contact Daniel Bech direct.
- 10.1 Should any member wish to view more information, please visit the Civic Society's website www.thecivicsociety.org

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

10.3 The Town Forum to set up a working party to review the Gateway. Mary Wardrop gave an update and asked that should any member wish to join the working party to contact her direct.

6. Reports from Borough Councillors

Councillor Price – Informed the Town Forum that he was currently awaiting a reply from the Chief Executive regarding various questions relating to the Cinema site and Heritage at Risk document. Once a reply had been received, he would inform Daniel Bech.

Action:

6.1 Leonard Price (Culverden Ward) to inform Daniel Bech regarding answers to questions relating to the Cinema site and RTW Conservation Area at Risk (English Heritage Register 2009).

Councillor Mrs Thomas – Stated that a report had been submitted to the Cabinet earlier that morning relating to Article 4 Direction. She went on to say that the Cabinet had agreed to start looking at areas of concern; Cabinet also agreed not to go forward with the detailed survey as that would be submitted at a later stage after due budgetary considerations.

Councillor Basu – Informed the Town Forum that he had visited the Gateway and had spoken to one of the Kent Highway Services Customer Advisors who stated that should any member of the public wish to speak in private then there were meeting rooms available to do so. There was also a telephone number that members of the public could ring to contact someone in Kent Highways Services.

Councillor Williams – Stated that during the six hours (Sunday 19 July) of the Mela in Royal Tunbridge Wells, Calverley Ground, the Police's Sgt. 8603 Balwinder Singh, reported that they had received over a hundred enquiries; ten had registered to apply for Police officer/staff roles, in addition to those interested in joining the Specials. This was more than in three days at the County Show. The majority were from Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

7. Reports from Champions/Vision Committee

Vision and Arts Committee – No matters arising.

Community Champion - Daniel Bech informed the Town Forum that a meeting had taken place on 9 July with the Commons Conservators. It was said that the Commons was actually registered as a 'Village Green' which falls altogether into a different legal category than a Common (Rodney Stone, Commons Conservators' Clerk).

Daniel Bech felt that Targetfollow would soon start to consult with the Conservators (consisting of four representatives of the Lord of the Manor (Targetfollow), four members of the Freehold Tenants' Association and four Borough councillors), to develop the car park on the former 'fun fair' site in Major York Road.

Planning Matters – No matters arising.

Green Issues – No matters arising.

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

Transport - Following on from Daniel Bech's comments above, John went on to say that he had emailed the Commons Conservators and Culverden Ward members relating to the planned grass-over of redundant Bishop's Down Road beyond the exit from the Spa Hotel and Manor Road, at an estimated cost of £60,000, although the grass-over may well be carried over to 2010.

John went on to say that the stub was approximately 64m long and served as an off-road car park for up to nearly 20 cars during the week. If the parking was disbursed, where would those cars then park? In John's opinion, the money would be better spent elsewhere on the Common to benefit both the Common and the community. A copy of Bishop's Down Road is shown as Appendix A to these minutes.

Health – John stated that he had attended a meeting at Pembury Baptist Church Hall on 29 July of which Greg Clark MP had chaired. The purpose of the meeting was to hear public concerns about transport to the new Pembury Hospital. Roughly about 80 people were present and representatives of the M&TW Hospital Trust, Kent County council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Southborough Town Council, parish councils, citizen groups and two bus companies.

Transport to the hospital was governed by the Trust's Travel Plan, legally required by the planning grant from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, with the core aim of reducing the use of private cars by encouraging the use of public transport (and cycling & walking) by limiting car parking places.

Although on National average, a bus passenger used 60-70% of the fuel used by a car passenger this would require a massive increase in bus services to avoid severe hardship, especially to patients and their carers and visitors. The bus companies stated that services would have to be viable and could only offer the prospect of doubling the frequency of the No 6 service to/from Maidstone to 2 hours and likewise to/from Tonbridge. It was noted that Hawkhurst was only served on Fridays. John went on to say that the Trust has stated the hospital car services would rely on volunteers and could hardly be expanded, there would be problems providing for full access to the disabled legally required by 2012.

John went on to explain that with local concerns for excessive street parking already, and the added congestion with the expansion of Tesco's superstore and Park & Ride, the meeting was greatly concerned with the adequacy of on-site car parking.

County Councillor Alan Marsh, KCC Cabinet member for Health, had said he was convinced that 1200 car parking spaces would not be enough. The Town Forum noted that it was then that John was able to follow with an explanation why the 1200 spaces came to be adopted and would not be adequate noting that 400 spaces instead of 250 for the patients group would be required to match Maidstone Hospital.

At that meeting, John had prepared a statement, which had also been circulated to Alan Marsh, Kent County Councillor Cabinet Member for Health, and to various borough, town and parish councillors. A copy of the statement is shown as Appendix B to these minutes.

The statement covered various issues, namely: transport to and from the new Pembury Hospital, which had to be controlled by the Trust's Travel Plan; and Parking spaces for the new hospital.

At the meeting, John had urged those present to ask all the NHS, KCC & TWBC staff to work together to arrive at a fair and humane parking provision, which could still be done within Government planning guidelines. The Trust, at the time, had assured the meeting that there was room for more parking spaces and a survey of travel requirements would be carried out, which would be put to public consultation later in the year.

The Town Forum was informed that John had offered to help the Trust as he had done previously as a PPI Forum member.

8. Calverley Park Crescent Freeholders' Association

Peter Perry raised these items. The Association had three main issues of concern, namely: the traffic in Crescent Road, Recreational cycling; and grot spots.

Traffic in Crescent Road – Peter stated that the volume of traffic continued to increase, and at some points during the day, could be continuous, which in turn led it to be very difficult and frightening for some of the elderly, children and teenagers to cross the road at Carrs Corner. He went on to say, Councillor Mrs Mayhew had some six years ago, written a letter expressing her disappointment at the lack of progress; a satisfactory resolution needs to be sought.

Other issues of concern for the Association were the number of heavy goods vehicles using the road. The vehicles passed within less than a metre of the balconies that project over the pavement in the centre of the block. The vibrations caused by the vehicles were felt within the buildings, which suffer as a result. The Association suggested that a tonnage limit be introduced, limiting the tonnage to 44.

Recreational Cycling – Peter reported that one of the residents had been trying to find safe routes to cycle for his three children. Councillor Williams informed Peter that there was a safe cycling facility within Hilbert Recreation Ground.

Grot Spot – Another concern which the Association had related to the rubbish tip – it was a disgrace, smelt and was very little effort made to monitor what was thrown away; there was also no 'free-cycling' facility available. Councillor Roy Bullock and Gary Stevenson, Head of Environment and Street Scene, clarified that the site was the Household Waste and Recycling Centre at North Farm operated by Kent County Council and that it acted as a transfer station for all household waste and material collected for composting unlike some sites in the county that were just for recycling dry, non odorous materials. Christopher Thomas advised that the tip was run by Kent County Council.

9. Royal Tunbridge Wells Conservation Area at Risk

As English Heritage has declared Royal Tunbridge Wells Conservation Area at Risk, Daniel Bech gave a presentation on why the town's CA is at Risk of neglect, decay, damaging change, over development?

Daniel Bech gave examples of **detractors in Royal Tunbridge Wells** like

- front gardens converting into car parking (loss of boundary walls / fences / hedges)
- facades with plastic windows/doors
- facades with satellite dishes
- facades / front patios with signs of estate agents
- pavements with A-boards of retail shops
- properties' colour schemes
- decay of shopfronts esp. with empty shops

A concern of the Town Forum, as most clearly shown in the presentation, was the apparent ignorance of Estate Agents when it came to the placing of For Sale/Sold/To Let/Let By signs. Some of these signs were shown to be attached to listed buildings.

The Town Forum also observed various other items of clutter taking up the pavements such as A-Boards, which also blocked the pavements. The presentation also showed the sprouting of satellite dishes on many listed buildings. These were unsightly and it was doubted that a single dish had permission for erection on said walls.

Alan Legg went on to explain that the Cabinet had received a report relating to **Article 4 Directions**. Although resources and capacity were limited, it had been agreed that the Council would like to work together with the Town Forum and the Civic Society and to facilitate partnership working. This could perhaps begin by looking at specific streets for addressing front garden parking. The Town Forum welcomed this initiative. Christopher also stated that he was pleased to see that the Council was not wasting £10,000 on consultants.

Alan also suggested that many of the examples illustrated in Daniel Bech's presentation were related to highways and the design and management of the public realm, something important to the character of the town. This issue should perhaps form part of the forthcoming Area Action Plan for Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre.

Daniel Bech asked Councillor Dr Linda Hall, the Council's Heritage Champion (Eastern area), what she would like to say. Councillor Dr Hall in reply stated that she thought the Town Forum's suggestions about Article 4 Directions, and of its picture show, was very informative. She endorsed the Town Forum's wish to use Article 4 Directions and saw it as a simple way forward; Cabinet had been much exercised about the Local Development Framework having priority. The Town Forum were informed that the Cabinet was concerned with 'place-shaping' which was just what a Conservation area was about, so that there was no conflict between the two. Councillor Dr Hall favoured a blanket Article 4 Direction for the whole of the Conservation Area to cover all inappropriate uses, because the presentation shown identified a clear state of decline.

Daniel Bech gave more examples of **further problems blighting Royal Tunbridge Wells** like

- bollards (Kent Highways Services)
- parking on pavements - damaged brick pavement
- lamp posts / lamp post remains (Kent Highways Services)
- broken utility boxes
- railings & offensive street clutter (Kent Highways Services)
- benches
- streetscape improvements required (TWBC Environmental Services)
- cycling roads in recreation grounds with unsightly barriers / more signs / non-permeable surfaces
- bins / recycling boxes in front patios (TWBC Environmental Services)
- bins on pavement (Residents / TWBC Environmental Services)
- commercial bins in prominent views (Shop owners / TWBC Environmental Services)

Daniel Bech went on to say that parking on pavements was not satisfactory. Members of the public in wheel chairs, parents with push chairs and the elderly, had to walk on the road to pass the parked vehicles, as not enough room was available for them to pass along ON the pavement. Gary Stevenson the Head of Environment and Street Scene stated that Parking Attendants could not enforce penalty notices on cars parked on pavements unless those cars were parked on yellow lines. If the car was causing an obstruction, then this would be a matter for the Police. Christopher Thomas asked when the Council would be seeking this power, which is used in London by local authorities already.

Daniel Bech pointed out the possible Impact on local economy, house prices, community and tourism. Daniel Bech brought to the Town Forum's attention that the **Tourism** Information Drums throughout the town had events inside which were out of date as they still had May 2009 events displayed.

Daniel Bech gave an update to Town Forum members on the **top 10 grot spots within Royal Tunbridge Wells**. Those 10 spots were:

- Ritz Building - Cinema Site
- Eridge Road (Land behind Petrol Station)
- Tunbridge Wells Central Station
- Balustrades and Colonnade of Monson Road
- Greyhound Public House
- 30 Warwick Park
- 73 Inner London Road
- 32 Mount Ephraim
- Albert Street
- RTW Wiesbaden Twin Town road signs
- Quarry Road
- Medway Depot

Daniel Bech updated the Town Forum of the changes made since the grot spots were identified. Improvements had been made to the Tunbridge Wells Central Station, Greyhound Public House (Upper Grosvenor Road), 30 Warwick Road, Medway Depot/TWBC Printing Building, and a few road signs.

Gary Stevenson advised the Town Forum that a working party had been established which concentrated on grot spots and empty properties. The list of grot spots before the Town Forum was the same list the working group was currently working on.

The Town Forum also noted that approval had been given to demolish a building along Quarry Road, which was owned by the Council. Gary was to investigate why demolition had not occurred.

Gary Stevenson informed members that a 'Compulsory Purchase Order' was currently being sought in relation to Victoria Road.

In relation to 73 Inner London Road, the property was now at a point where refurbishment was unlikely, mainly due to financial reasons. Vandals and 'rough sleepers' had broken into the property and had caused damage. Gary stated that funding could be made available to the owner of the property to assist in the refurbishment. George Lawson, for the Inner London Road Residents Association, was asked by Daniel Bech to make comment upon the Grot Spot. George made it quite clear the overwhelming concern held over this area. This was not only held by the immediate neighbours to the property, but also the neighbourhood association and the Fire Service who were extremely concerned of the dangerous fire risk to adjoining properties and also safety.

Alan Legg, Principal Design and Heritage Officer, informed members that although planning permission and listed building consent had been granted, it appeared that there seemed little likelihood of this currently being implemented. The owner was therefore being written to by enforcement officers to require urgent works; otherwise a Section 215 notice would be issued on the property.

On concluding Daniel Bech brought to the Town Forum's attention the plans for "**Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom**" to be reintroduced in 2010 and referred to a TWBC report back in 2003, the last time "RTW in Bloom" took place.

In response Councillor Bullock asked the Town Forum to put together two packages: He asked that the Town Forum put together their concerns relating to street scene/clutter. It was noted that the street scene had over the past three years deteriorated since Kent County Council Highways took responsibility for highways. He went on to say that he would arrange a meeting to take place with key borough and county officers to show the Town Forum's presentation and to try and obtain a higher standard of street scene. The Town Forum welcomed this meeting and looked forward to being involved. Alastair Tod asked that the Civic Society be involved in the meeting, which would include Kent Highway Services.

The Town Forum was also asked to put together a package that outlined all the issues that were the sole responsibility of the Borough Council, for instance graffiti, identify location(s) of dumped rubbish, street clutter and also bin storage problems. Once received, Councillor Bullock would take action and arrange a further meeting which would include Borough Council officers and the Town Forum.

Councillor Bullock informed the Town Forum that Kent Fire & Rescue had contacted the Council at the weekend and informed them that small fires were being lit at the old cinema site and had expressed some concerns with regards to security of the site. The Kent Fire & Rescue Service was now in direct contact with the developers to resolve the issue. The Fire Service had been called out no less than three times.

Councillor Bullock went on to say that the owner of the site had three options relating to the public right of way: 1) to appeal against Kent County Council's decision, which was a lengthy process, 2) appeal to the planning authority to divert the footpaths and 3) to make some minor adjustments to the scheme to allow the public right of way to exist.

The Town Forum noted that an investigation regarding the footpath had been completed and as a result the Senior Public Rights of Way Officer, Countryside Access Service, had sought and obtained delegated authority to make an Order to add the two routes at footpath status on the basis that the rights were reasonably alleged to subsist. The demolition of the site was hoped to be carried out in September.

The Town Forum was informed of some sad news, Brian Hayward, the Senior Design and Heritage Officer, a highly valued member of Borough Council staff, had recently died; the Town Forum gave their condolences to his family and work colleagues.

Michael Doyle stated that it was the residents' and the Borough Council's responsibility to resource and maintain Conservation Areas that exist within the town. Alastair Tod endorsed Mr Doyle's comments.

The Town Forum thanked Daniel Bech for his hard work and congratulated him on his presentation; the presentation can be downloaded from:

www.townforum.org.uk/community/rtwconservationareatrisk-rtwfppt300709db.pdf

Actions:

- 9.1 That the Town Forum put together two presentation packages regarding: Highway issues and also Street Scene/Clutter issues.
- 9.2 That Councillor Bullock arrange a meeting between Borough and County officers to present the Town Forum's concerns of the numerous highway issues. This meeting to involve the Civic Society (a member of the Town Forum) together with other representatives of the Town Forum members (councillors / associations).
- 9.3 Cllr Bullock to arrange a further meeting to discuss environmental issues under the responsibility of the Borough Council i.e bins/graffiti/street clutter.

10. Any Other Business

Planned Pedestrian Safety Measures – A267 Frant Road, Tunbridge Wells – The Chairman, Christopher Thomas, informed the Town Forum that he had received an email from Kent Highway Services, attaching a copy of a consultation letter and scheme plan relating to the A264 Frant Road, Tunbridge Wells pedestrian safety measures. Should any member of the Town Forum wish to respond to the consultation in their own capacity, to do so. The Chairman would be responding on behalf of the Town Forum in full support of the proposals. Appendix C to these minutes is the consultation letter and plan for the Town Forum's information.

Action:

- 10.1 Should any Town Forum member wish to respond to the consultation in their own capacity to do so. Replies would need to be received in writing to Kent Highway Services no later than 14 August 2009.

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

- 24 September 2009 at 6.30pm (Samantha Timms apologies, Cheryl Clark in attendance)
- 29 October 2009 at 6.30pm – Commons Conservators in attendance, Rodney Stone, Ian Marshall and Steve Budden.
- 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
- 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 a possibility of holding this meeting in a different venue and at a different time.

24 September 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 7 September 2009.

12. The meeting closed at: 8.20pm.

(Note: Councillor Mrs Herriot left the meeting during minute 9 (7.45pm); Simon Wilshaw, Tunbridge Wells Neighbourhood Police, left the meeting during minute 9 (7.48pm); Alan Legg left the meeting during minute 9 (7.55pm); Councillor Peter Bulman left the meeting during minute 9 (8.05pm); Councillor Mrs Thomas left the meeting during minute 9 (8.06pm); and Councillors Dr Hall, Price and Woodward left the meeting at end of the discussion on minute 9 (8.15pm).)