



# A place of pleasure and resort



## Tunbridge Wells tourism and the cultural offer

Working Group on Leisure, Culture and Tourism  
January 2013

The remits of the four Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum working groups on planning and development, traffic, leisure culture and tourism, and finance, together with the work on Water in the Wells, all interact. The full Town Forum draws on their advice to prepare collective views and make recommendations at its bi-monthly meetings.

This document offers the views of the Working Group on Leisure, Culture and Tourism on some topics which we were asked to address urgently. Its proposals are those of the Working Group only as they have yet to be considered by the full Town Forum.

Current membership of the working group is:

June Bridgeman (chair)	Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District
Dave Barnett	Grosvenor Park Residents Association
John Cunningham	Warwick Park Residents Association
Maggie Fraser	Over Fifties Forum
Dorothea Holman	Boyne Park Residents Association
Sue Kaner	Camden Road Guild
Catherine Mayhew	Borough Councillor, Park Ward
Marguerita Morton	St John's Residents Association
Anne Stobo	Friends of TW Museum, Library and Art Gallery
Mary Wardrop	Sherborne Close Management

*Coopted member*

Alex Green	Trinity Arts Centre
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*Ex officio members*

David Wakefield	RTWTF Chair & Inner London Road Residents Association
Michael Doyle	RTWTF Deputy Chair & Hawkenbury Village Association

This membership besides representing the views of their parent organisations, has among it senior professional and management experience in the fields of education at all ages, law, psychiatry, media, marketing, planning and resource management, communications, landscape architecture, creative arts and central and local government. This mixture of skills and knowledge has not only proved valuable in preparing this memorandum, but is an indication of the scale and variety of the talent bank available within the Forum and its member organisations as a whole.

We warmly thank all those others who have contributed helpful material and ideas, with special mention of Philip Whitbourn for conceptual drawings showing the art of the possible.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This memorandum warmly welcomes the Council's current initiatives to foster links between inward tourism and enhanced cultural and retail facilities as a major contributor to the economic health of the Borough and making it "a good place to live". Higher tourism revenues especially from overnight stays would benefit the whole borough. It focuses on two pressing issues; clarification of the Tunbridge Wells "brand" and the potential of the Town Hall complex to accommodate new cultural and associated retail facilities. Work on other aspects is in hand for future reports.

It suggests the Council avoids ephemeral slogans, instead building on the town's long established quality image, and its value as a first class short stay centre for excursions. It recommends continuing portrayal as "a place of pleasure and resort" but with more confident and coherent marketing of what is available and a high profile for its unique features, collections and events as the cultural centre of the Kentish and Sussex Weald.

The Town Hall complex of buildings was built to house together a variety of cultural, educational and civic activities catering for the town's needs at the time. Refurbished sensitively and flexibly these buildings could in that same tradition be an ideal location at the top of the town to complement the Pantiles with a second major attraction for tourists based on displaying the museum's hidden treasures while retaining the Borough's key civic functions *in situ*. Carefully selected retail outlets and other activities would help provide financial viability. This would also give a boost to surrounding businesses and those located all along the "spine" running down to the Pantiles.

A practical six point action plan is proposed, having regard to the need to manage resources flexibly and prudently, under which the Council would:-

1. announce its intention to respect and conserve the Town Hall complex of listed buildings and to maintain key civic functions there. But better use can be made of space to build up a new major tourist attraction and public facilities using the museum collections as its basis. This will be done in partnership with Pantiles interests and nearby attractions so as to develop an improved cultural and "heritage shopping" offer for the whole borough;
2. announce that the draft Local Plan will designate the Town Hall complex along with nearby interesting buildings as a key area for civic, leisure and cultural purposes with associated retail;
3. commission an architectural master plan for the Town Hall and main associated buildings that provides public access and a new "galleria" arcade round the building for much enhanced displays of the museum's collections, community activities, and associated niche and memorabilia shopping;
4. publish the draft architect's brief for public comment as a demonstration of Council commitment to open government;
5. construct in advance of the rest of the works a new galleria entrance and shop between the Town Hall and Museum/Library and use these as a launching pad to secure finance and other resources for an incremental approach as resources allow;

6. emphasise its positive approach and belief in promoting the excellence of town centre facilities by early improvement of the back stage facilities of the Assembly Hall.

It recommends appointment of two key facilitators; a highly experienced tourism manager to lead the project on a long term basis involving the private sector; and a commercial and marketing manager to raise funds and establish a sound capital and revenue financial basis for the Councils's own activities.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## **Purpose of this memorandum**

1.1. As part of the Working Group's remit on leisure, culture and tourism, this memorandum offers suggestions about the priority issues of :

- the Tunbridge Wells brand; and
- the potential of the Town Hall complex for enhanced cultural and related retail activities to boost the economy, create employment and benefit people throughout the Borough.

It also indicates some topics being explored further by the Group.

## **Background**

1.2. The Town Forum has identified three priority areas for its work, namely planning and development, traffic problems, and encouragement of inward tourism in Royal Tunbridge Wells. Working Groups have been set up to address each of these and to progress Water in the Wells.

1.3. The remit given to the Working Group on Leisure Culture and Tourism is to

- encourage development of a long term strategy that embraces improved facilities and services for residents and visitors alike, and benefits business and employment;
- recognise leisure, culture and tourism as an important sector in the Tunbridge Wells economy and employment, bringing visitors to the town and supporting the town as a "good place to live"; and
- bring forth a strategy for improved facilities to house cultural assets including the museum, art gallery and library, and Assembly Rooms

1.4. The importance of the second element is self evident. Studies carried out for the Council<sup>1</sup> showed that tourism earned the borough £232 million in 2009 and employed 9% of its workforce. Day visitors constituted 93% of all visitors, though longer stay and overseas visitors yielded higher expenditure per head. Well over a third of their money was spent on shopping and a further third in catering establishments. The balance went mainly into accommodation and transport.

1.5. On the cultural front, the Council's recent Fleming report<sup>2</sup> proposes a "creative hub" in Tunbridge Wells as a cornerstone of growth to help make good economic ground lost in recent years, promoting education and creative apprenticeships. Last July's report by the highly knowledgeable group led by the then Council Leader<sup>3</sup> envisages the area as cultural centre of the Kentish and Sussex Weald.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Economic Impact of Tourism on the Borough of Tunbridge Wells 2009: Tourism SE Research Unit.*

<sup>2</sup> *A Cultural and Creative Industries Framework for Tunbridge Wells Borough 2012: Tom Fleming Consultancy.*

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Tunbridge Wells Town Advisory Panel, July 2012.*

1.6. We were asked to address the third element of our remit as a priority, given the current debate on the future of the Town Hall complex <sup>4</sup>, financial squeeze, reports in hand at local and county level on tourism and destination marketing, Overview and Scrutiny Committee work on a shared cultural vision and strategy, and the current state of play on the Local Plan and Kent transport policies. As a framework for the future, we were also asked to suggest what basic image of itself Tunbridge Wells should project nationally. So these are the main matters on which this memorandum concentrates.

### **Our approach**

1.7. We wanted to come up with some immediate constructive ideas that the Council could take on board at manageable cost. A function of the Town Forum is to reflect what local people love about where they live and the quality of local life, and to encourage policies that benefit them and enhance Tunbridge Wells unique character as one of Kent's most important heritage areas. This needs an agreed general approach to its problems and priorities, and well planned deployment of the resources available. We therefore decided to:

- build our proposals on strengths the town already possesses, while identifying negative influences needing to be tackled;
- identify where shrewd investment of resources could not only prime beneficial initiatives but also pay off handsomely in the medium and longer term;
- identify some visible low-cost early initiatives to help build up public awareness and engagement, and create momentum towards the longer term goals;
- undertake our own specific fact finding and analysis where appropriate, using wherever possible the knowledge and contacts of Town Forum members generally.

### **Negative influences**

1.8. Three major negative influences on local tourism fall within the remits of other working groups, namely,

- loss of the eponymous Pantiles spring which should urgently be restored as a top priority for the whole town;
- congested traffic conditions challenging any tourist wanting to use the town as an excursions base; and
- the visual blight of the derelict cinema site, the vistas and skylines being damaged by graceless buildings and frontages, and the haphazard street clutter including cavalier treatment of the historic brick pavements by KCC contractors.

We have drawn the attention of our fellow groups to the harmful impact on tourism potential as well as on the quality of Tunbridge Wells life in general.

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4. Our shorthand term to cover Town Hall, Assembly Hall, police station and former Court room, Museum, Library, Art Gallery and Adult Education Centre buildings, together with Calverley Terrace, all of which are listed buildings.

## **New initiatives**

1.9. We warmly welcome:

- the Council's focus on the local tourist and cultural offer as a key economic driver, manifest in a major cabinet portfolio combining Tourism Leisure and Economic Development;
- the winding up of the contentious Regeneration Company in favour of considering how existing public buildings might instead with some internal modifications be adapted to serve better both civic functions and other valuable activities. This makes good financial sense;
- the indication that Council staff will "tourism test" all their actions for impact good or bad. Breaking new ground will, however, need strong leadership and commitment. We were impressed by Wiesbaden's use of a high quality professional tourist marketing firm working to a clear brief, and what this had achieved;
- the helpful Town Hall responses to our requests for information and an insight into some issues where our contributions could be timely. This is a mutually beneficial approach;
- indications of fresh thinking and creative initiatives by the owners of the Pantiles; and the potential of the new Friends Groups concerned with the town's parks and green spaces to contribute to the local heritage, cultural and recreational offer.

## 2. THE TUNBRIDGE WELLS BRAND

2.1. Guide books generally present Royal Tunbridge Wells as an elegant residential eighteenth century spa town, with the Pantiles as its iconic attraction. They praise its pleasant and varied domestic architecture amid green vistas as still largely unspoiled by intrusive or characterless modern buildings. Some identify it as a good short stay centre for a variety of interesting visits in beautiful countryside. All these are features for which it has been known and valued since its earliest days, along with its healthful airy situation and its entertainments. We see no merit in seeking to replace this long established quality leisure and cultural image with something down-market or an ephemeral advertising slogan. Recent media lampooning of re-branding notions shows some of the dangers of such an approach.

2.2. Despite some recent depredations, Tunbridge Wells is still a highly desirable place in which to live or to visit for shopping and sightseeing, with its airy hills and commons, green vistas and array of cultural and recreational enjoyments for old and young at hand. We believe the right starting point is to build on those strengths. Although not in the top ranks of national tourist attractions, it is still, as a 19<sup>th</sup> century guide book aptly put it, “A place of pleasure and resort”. This traditional phrase neatly encapsulates its historic associations and attributes, its long valued qualities as an antidote to stress, as well as its access to enjoyable activities both within the town and in the nearby rich assortment of historic houses, beautiful gardens and places of interest.

2.3. We list over 60 of these attractions in Annex A. “Excursions” to nearby places of interest have always been a key part of the Tunbridge Wells brand and feature extensively in early guide books. With modern transport, the range of choices has vastly increased as have the variety of clientele. It can justly be claimed that the town is the ideal base for exploring the Kentish and Sussex Weald, or rather that it would be ideal if the problems of traffic congestion getting in to and out of the town were solved.

2.4. That said, the Tunbridge Wells image has become a little faded and disappointing to some tourists with the malaise of the Pantiles in recent years, and closure or relocation of many of its former individually run shops and leisure activities around the top of Mount Pleasant. Neglected assets of national significance are its magnificent collections of costumes and of Tunbridge Ware hidden away in storage or crammed together in old-fashioned showcases due to lack of space to display them properly. Both the town and the Museum need a more confident themed approach to informing and attracting visitors, emphasising and displaying the features that distinguish it from elsewhere and enable it fairly to lay claim to being the cultural capital of West Kent and the Sussex Weald.

2.5. In part these features are the overall ensemble of the town’s buildings, streets and open spaces. But they also include its many interesting properties set in green surroundings and varied entertainments on offer for all tastes. Quality accommodation and attractive local facilities were the two key basic features on which Beau Nash, to whom Tunbridge Wells and Bath both owe so much, successfully concentrated to put these towns firmly on the leisure and cultural tourism map.

2.6. We welcome the Council initiative to assemble a better overview of planned 2013 local events, and to review how they might be marketed more coherently and accessibly. We have ourselves begun work on aspects of this. Hopefully the consultants study commissioned by the

Council on local tourism will by the summer have clarified what is most likely to attract today's visitors to a town like Tunbridge Wells, and suggest how that can be fostered.

2.7. The right marketing expertise will then need to be available to develop workable new ideas, make and enthuse the right contacts. Much of this will be about motivating and advising hoteliers, attraction organisers and retailers to work together on mutually supportive lines. This will take sustained effort. Annex B sets out the findings of one of our group about how Weisbaden has tackled this with impressive results.

2.8. Two things have long been clear however without waiting for any further reports. First, the need for regeneration of the Pantiles offer with its walks of small shops and its spring. It is the unique national and international recognition factor for Tunbridge Wells. Second, the town cries out for a second major tourist attraction to complement the Pantiles, where the demise of the imaginative *Day at the Wells* is still mourned by some. Getting these matters right is crucial for the success of the Council's policies.

### **3. THE POTENTIAL OF THE TOWN HALL BUILDINGS COMPLEX**

3.1. Activities built around the Spa Valley railway to the south of the Pantiles could, and should, be expanded and marketed. But any major new attraction should encourage movement between the Pantiles and the upper part of the town. The existing complex of civic, cultural and leisure buildings at the top of Mount Pleasant, long due for internal modernisation, is the obvious candidate for serious investigation. Current discussion of the Town Hall's future following dissolution of the unlamented Regeneration Company makes this particularly timely. This is an unrepeatable opportunity and the most important strategic policy decision currently facing the Council where it can have a direct role in shaping the town's future. Doing nothing is a policy in itself and unlikely to bring the outcomes of most benefit to local people.

#### **Tackling the planning gap**

3.2. But the future of the Town Hall complex cannot be treated in isolation. It is no accident that Tunbridge Wells town planners of the past ambitiously decided to group together on this strategic site not only a range of civic functions but also a museum, art gallery, assembly hall, library, adult education institute, and opera house. Together with other important nearby buildings this is a unique ensemble of facilities with great potential to adapt within their own walls to meet changing expectations and needs. Their location helps to link activities in our elongated town. Between the twin poles of fresh activity in this key central area and a reviving Pantiles the many important retail businesses along the connecting "spine" route could be helped to thrive, increasing both the attractiveness of the town to residents and visitors alike and its economic health.

3.3. The damaging consequences of the absence of an agreed strategy for the disposition of future activities in this area in the statutory planning sense have long been recognised. Problems over the cinema site are just one outcome. We see nothing to stop the Council tackling this lacuna forthwith. It could announce its firm intention that a mixture of civic, leisure, and cultural purposes with associated minor retail activity will continue to be the major function of this central neighbourhood and that this will be reflected in the designations made in the Local Plan as it grinds its way through the requisite bureaucratic stages. Associated conference and hotel accommodation would not be ruled out.

3.4. Such a declaration of intent would cost virtually nothing, but by offering a sense of purpose and a local framework for action would begin the process of regeneration and innovation so badly needed. This would include detailed transport and access planning, and focussed consideration of the total street scene around the central crossroads. It would also allow the current pause in redeveloping the cinema site, located in such a prominent central position, to be put to good use by some fresh thinking about its role in this setting rather than as simply another commercial redevelopment determined by others. Whatever is erected, its appearance will be a crucial element in the overall street ensemble, the relationships and harmony between the current buildings and open spaces and views of the town from elsewhere.

#### **Enhancing the leisure and cultural role of the Town Hall complex**

3.5. With the Town Hall complex thus placed firmly at the heart of regeneration activity, some judicious Council investment could prime the process to move things in a positive direction.

The commitment would be to preserve *in situ* the essential civic functions that need to lie at the heart of the town, but to make better use of extra space becoming available there as public expectations change and responsibilities and methods of service delivery shift. Its internal refurbishment would be designed to enable much better economic and cultural use to be made of the museum and other assets the town possesses and provide flexibility for new opportunities as they arise. Coupled with announcement of an upgrade of the back stage facilities of the Assembly Hall this would be a powerful affirmation of the Council's commitment to sensitive renovation for public benefit.

3.6. As a key part of the process, a new partnership task force with Pantiles representatives could be set up while the new ideas there are still under initial development. Its remit would be to plan to secure maximum benefit to both upper and lower town businesses.

### **Internal rearrangement of the civic buildings to enhance leisure and cultural facilities**

3.7. Preliminary examination has revealed a surprising amount of dead space hidden within and between the civic buildings. The conceptual diagrams at Annex C show one way this might be used along with some vacated sections to create good connections at ground level between and through them, as indicated by the red dots. Removing some internal non-structural walls could allow construction of an attractive pillared public arcade or "galleria" running all round the complex. Flexible new space could be created for significant expansion and integration of the museum and art gallery displays, some new community facilities for meetings and perhaps weddings and a selection of carefully selected small craft shops that would contribute income. The failed application for Heritage Lottery funds could be reformulated with significantly extended ambitions and horizons.

3.8. There is no question that some of the local ill-will about a "remote" Council and suspicions created by past happenings would be reduced by reopening the Town Hall to the public. This process could be started by creation of a new accessible public entrance leading into both the Library and the first part of the galleria in the space between the Museum and Town Hall blocks and including in this a large shop selling high quality Tunbridge Wells memorabilia and literature as well as providing much-needed space for local community information. Associated with redesign of the frontage gardens making them publicly accessible this would convey a message of welcome rather than aloofness.

3.9. Redesigning the interiors of these listed buildings sensitively to preserve their historic features while catering for new uses will be a highly professional job and may reveal further potential. Once a master plan is agreed it can then be implemented in stages. This would spread costs, minimise disruption and allow for as yet unforeseen new opportunities. Annex D sets out some items that might be included in the architects design brief, which we suggest should be offered for public comments before it is implemented.

### **Managing the finances**

3.10. By starting with this new galleria entrance and shop, the Council would create an immediate central public venue to share and explain the overall aims, plans and timetables for the development project. The clear message would be that unlike the Regeneration Company this is an open partnership venture with nothing about its planning hidden as "commercial in confidence", no suspected secret deals or conflicts of interest, and with all the benefits intended

to accrue to the whole local community. An aim would be not just to capture public interest and support but to attract sponsors and grant givers.

3.11. Money and staff for setup and subsequent maintenance will obviously be key considerations. Major grants from the heritage funds and others, depending on the type of new facilities being created, can be applied for, to support what is clearly a highly imaginative but practical regeneration scheme making the best possible use of existing resources and creating a new regional heritage centre. Donors might be asked to match what the Council itself is willing to provide as an appropriate and prudent community investment of some of its capital reserves of public money. The investment would lie fair and square within the “value” quartile of the Council “strategic compass” and serve all its other declared aims. Within the complex, company and institutional sponsors could be sought to create and maintain specific rooms or displays of the museum and art collections, and voluntary contributions in kind sought from local artists, authors and designers.

3.12. To cover subsequent running costs, other forms of financial underpinning might include charges for entry to “special” exhibitions, as in London galleries and modest charges for renting meeting rooms. One of the twin Decimus Burton terrace houses could be turned into a museum about his local work, perhaps by a volunteer history group, encouraging visits to some of the properties, and sales of associated books and pictures. The other could be furnished by the Friends of the Museum with daily objects, toys and costumes from the museum collections as an exemplar of “Children’s lives in Victorian Tunbridge Wells” including rural children and those in the workhouse, thus carrying forward the Tunbridge Wells story from the Pantiles 18<sup>th</sup> century theme. The Victorian element in the primary school curriculum would encourage school visits from a wide radius. Unlike the rest of the museum, entry fees could be charged for these new special attractions.

3.13. Rent and a percentage of takings from the entrance shop, planned and run with attractive stock, catalogues and literature like National Trust and London gallery retail outlets, and linked with an online shopping service, could be an excellent income generator as well as promote tourist satisfaction. Shopping booths and workshops and demonstrations accessed from the galleria arcade would all contribute to overhead costs as would a well-designed conferencing space. The Council Chamber and Mayor’s Parlour could at certain times be made available for a fee for civil weddings.

3.14. The possibility could be reviewed of returning some Gateway activities like planning information, with a view to running cost savings and creating better links between the role of Town Hall and public perceptions. Hiring a professional commercial manager to generate grants and donations, and to set up future management on sound financial lines would be a shrewd investment. Results elsewhere have shown that large amounts can be raised this way.

#### **Further new opportunities**

3.15. Looking ahead to further possibilities, as part of the Fleming “creative arts hub”, links with textile and costume design training courses could foster a new academic centre of excellence in this field. This approach could be applied to other fields of activity. Increased visitor footfall around the buildings would generate custom in neighbouring businesses and encourage new niche shops and activities there rather than simply an ever multiplying number of national brand cafes.

3.15. We have already suggested to the Council possible development of a film arts centre. A presentation by others on that is being made to officers in January. We welcome Council interest in exploring this idea further. The centre might advise about suitable local buildings and settings for shooting films, encourage use of the Museum's collections for reference, and give introductions to local firms able to make various types of sets, props and costumes. A facility on these lines could be in a different building from the museum, such as the Great Hall, (which might alternatively convert into an attractive hotel and conference venue). If offering interesting changing displays related to popular productions, it could be a valuable tourist staging post between the Pantiles and the top of the town and promote visits to the Museum itself.

#### **Using the Council's other property resources**

3.16. We have had neither time nor resources to review the many sites on the Regeneration Company property list as an aspect of the third element of our remit but understand the Council has recently set up a task force to review these comprehensively, together with the many other unpublished minor interests in land it also holds. It would be most helpful as part of the Council's commitment to transparency for it to publish a complete list of these sites in Tunbridge Wells town, and to allow the public an opportunity to comment before disposal action is irrevocably taken. Interests in land are one of the most valuable resources the Council possesses for "making things happen". Once land is disposed of, planning controls can only prevent or modify what others choose to propose.

## 4. THE WAY AHEAD

4.1. This memorandum has concentrated on presenting suggestions about a way forward on the two issues we were advised were urgent. We have yet to review local leisure and recreation facilities but past Forum work has already covered some important aspects of these. Seeking ideas from all the Friends Groups will be a first step in updating this material. Besides parks and sports grounds, review needs to include local venues for outdoor activities - golf, rock climbing, water and adventure sports, wild life studies.

4.2. Meanwhile our Working Group will continue to focus on offering ideas about inward tourism, taking account of the various public policy documents as they appear. We plan to review:

- the quality and range of souvenirs currently available in the town, and their tacit messages;
- the scope and quality of tourist literature and other forms of communication, including the internet, and where they are currently to be found;
- identification of local facilities already offering distinctive and unusual experiences that could be better publicised, with preparation of a dossier of ideas for what would attract tourists as “well worth a visit”, particularly an overnight stay
- how local overnight accommodation might be better linked to particular clienteles, perhaps through linked “deals” with attractions and transport providers, and the private sector encouraged to play a more active role in this aspect of tourism.

4.3. Our ideas set out in this memorandum about the Tunbridge Wells brand and the development of better cultural facilities as part of the Town Hall complex are intended to help the Council chart a cost-effective way towards its vision for the future. In brief the actions we recommend are to:-

- announce its intention to respect and conserve the Town Hall complex of listed buildings and to maintain the borough’s key civic functions there. But better use can be made of spare space to build up a new major tourist attraction and public facilities using the museum collections as its basis. This will be done in partnership with Pantiles interests and nearby attractions so as to develop an improved cultural and “heritage shopping” offer for the whole borough
- announce that the draft Local Plan will designate the Town Hall complex along with nearby interesting buildings as a key area for civic, leisure and cultural purposes with associated retail.
- commission an architectural master plan for the Town Hall and main associated buildings that provides a new “galleria” arcade round the building for much enhanced displays of the museum’s collections, community activities, and associated niche and memorabilia shopping.
- publish the draft architect’s brief for public comment as a demonstration of Council commitment to open government;

- construct in advance of the rest of the works a new galleria entrance and shop between the Town Hall and Museum/Library, and use these as a launching pad to attract finance and other resources for an incremental approach as resources allow;
- emphasise its positive approach and belief in promoting the excellence of town centre facilities by early improvement of the back stage facilities of the Assembly Hall.

4.4. Key early staff appointments to strengthen professional capability will be a highly experienced tourism manager to lead the project on a long term basis; and a commercial and marketing manager to raise funds and establish a solid financial basis for covering running costs, working closely with the tourism manager. Experience elsewhere has shown how valuable professional fund-raising can be.

4.5. Together these proposals would provide a framework to lift the town's historic core out of the strategic planning limbo within which it has languished for too long, improve facilities for residents and visitors alike and benefit business and employment. Outlays could be programmed on a manageable basis as resources allowed, and by providing some early results would foster private involvement and build momentum. The Tunbridge Wells brand and those improvements to its leisure and culture offer would fit all the aims of the Council's "Strategic Compass" and contribute to a prosperous, healthy, green and confident borough. As part of the Council's long-term Vision they would associate both public and private interests and Tunbridge Wells residents in a shared effort to energise once more Tunbridge Wells fundamental character as a place of pleasure and resort.



## Tunbridge Wells as a tourist centre or resort: some attractions it offers<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Within the town centre:

- **Tunbridge Ware:** The world's finest collection of Tunbridge Ware is poorly displayed due to lack of space. A unique tourist attraction if properly promoted and displayed
- **Costume:** The extensive Costume Collection held in store by the Museum due to lack of display space could be also be a regional tourist attraction if appropriately displayed.

### 2. Surrounding towns and villages:

Tunbridge Wells adjoins the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Dozens of historic towns and villages including Cranbrook, Goudhurst and Hawkhurst have pleasures and sights to offer. Across the county boundaries of Sussex and Surrey is a further wealth of historic places with interesting churches, picturesque buildings and pubs and special associations with national figures. Marketing links with other centres with historic/heritage links with Tunbridge Wells such as Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Ashdown Forest and with the High Weald Project could be of mutual benefit.

### 3. Historic houses and gardens of national importance:

Tunbridge Wells lies at the centre of possibly the most densely-concentrated collection of historic houses and gardens in the whole of Britain. Within a radius of some 25 miles/50 minutes, there are some 45 attractive and interesting properties/sites to visit. They include:

- **Some 20 National Trust properties/sites** – Alfriston; Bateman's; Birling Gap; Bodiam Castle; Chartwell; Chiddingstone Village; Cobham Wood & Mausoleum; Emmetts Garden; Ightham Mote; Knole; Monk's House, Rodmell; Nymans; Old Soar Manor, Plaxtol; Quebec House, Westerham; Scotney Castle and garden; Sheffield Park; Sissinghurst Castle and garden; Smallhythe Place; Standen; and Wakehurst Place.
- **Some 9 English Heritage properties/sites** – Battle Abbey and site of Battle of Hastings; Bayham Abbey; Eynsford Castle; Kit's Coty House; Lullingstone Roman Villa; Rochester Castle; St. Leonard's Tower, West Malling; Sutton Valence Castle; and Temple Manor, Rochester.
- **At least 9 other 'unaffiliated' properties open to the public** – Charleston; Chiddingstone Castle; Firle Place; Great Dixter; Groombridge Place; Hurstmonceux Castle (and the Observatory Science Centre); Leeds Castle; Lullingstone Castle; and Penshurst Place.
- **Many historic churches**, including Rochester Cathedral; Holy Trinity, TW (now the Arts Centre); King Charles the Martyr, TW; Speldhurst (Burne-Jones and William Morris windows); Tudeley (Chagall windows); and Withyham (the Sackville Chapel).

Beyond the 25 mile/50 minute radius there are further historic buildings easily reached on a day trip by car from Tunbridge Wells, including in particular a further **8 English Heritage properties** –

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the data in this annex is drawn from a thoughtful strategy paper by John Cunningham of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society on "*The Importance of tourism to Tunbridge Wells: an assessment and proposals*". He has sent this to the Council.

- Dover Castle; Faversham Stone Chapel; Maison Dieu, Ospringe; Pevensey Roman Fort and Castle; Richborough Roman Fort and Amphitheatre; Reculver Towers and Roman Fort; Upnor Castle, and Walmer Castle.

#### 4. Further major accessible attractions

Also outside the 25 mile/50 minute radius, seaside and other attractions accessible on a day trip include:

- **Brighton** (Pavilion, Pier, Hove, Kemp Town, The Lanes & Rottingdean) 35 miles/60 minutes;
- **Canterbury** (Cathedral and historic medieval walled town) 50 miles/75 minutes;
- **Chatham** (Dockyards and Forts) 30 miles/60 minutes;
- **Eastbourne & Beachy Head** 30 miles/60 minutes;
- **Faversham** (medieval town) 42 miles/65 minutes;
- **Rye & Winchelsea** (Cinque Port/medieval town, Lamb's House) 30 miles/60 minutes;
- **Hastings** (fishermen's houses and castle) 28miles/55 minutes.

#### 5. More specialist interests

Tunbridge Wells is also well placed to cater for tourists with more specialist interests. Golf is mentioned in the memorandum. But there are other interests that may be worth fostering, eg. with joint accommodation packages. For example there are three "heritage railways" within the 25mile/50 minute radius (the Spa Valley; the Bluebell; and the Kent and East Sussex, with the Colonel Stephens Museum) and the unique Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch can easily be combined with some of the churches of Romney Marsh on a day trip..

#### 6. Conclusion

Altogether there are at least 60 attractive and easily reached destinations for a day's or half day's outing, all of which could justify a visitor staying at least one night (and hopefully more) in Tunbridge Wells. A good number can be reached by rail or bus from Tunbridge Wells by those without a car, as of course can London by a quarter hourly train service, with all it has to offer overseas visitors by way of museums, galleries, historic sites, shops and theatres on a cheap day rail ticket. Conversely a day's train excursion to Tunbridge Wells and some of its attractions is fully feasible for visitors staying in London.

## Learning from our Friends:

### A strategy to develop a vision for tourism in our twin-town Wiesbaden

#### Introduction

Since 2002 I have been a frequent visitor to Wiesbaden (pop. 280,000), our twin town in Germany, with members of the Twinning Association. I have been impressed by the concerted effort the town has been making to advertise itself. This I was able to detect as a mere consumer without having talked to any of the officials about it. On my December 2012 visit to Wiesbaden for the Christmas Market, I took the opportunity to meet Simone Zagrudnik, Head of Marketing of **Wiesbaden Marketing GmbH**, the organisation set up by the Town Hall exclusively to market the town. I have brought back a number of brochures and leaflets to illustrate their work and would be happy to make them available.

The twin towns have one vital thing in common: their Spa history on which they both seek to build. All other significant criteria - size, status and finances are very different. These differences do not, however, preclude us from learning from their example.

#### Marketing of Tourism in Wiesbaden

Wiesbaden Marketing (WM) provides the unified face of Wiesbaden internally and externally. It is the official organisation serving town organisations and institutions as well as being a partner for activities and performances organised by external organisations.

Prior to 2003 there was no unified marketing policy in Wiesbaden. There was merely a variety of organisations which did their own marketing independently. These included Tourist Services which organised city walks, and the Kurhaus, (Spa House), which marketed the various activities associated with the spa and the actual central spa building which has several large halls used for concerts, balls, meetings and other events. Realising the need for a focused marketing policy, the Lord Mayor, together with the other councillors set up a separate organisation to develop a vision and a strategy to achieve it. It was only in 2009, however, that WM was eventually established as a limited company in the shape and size it is now. Up to 2009 all staff were employees of the Town Hall. Today WM has a total of 41 staff, of which, even now, only 4 staff and 6 trainees are actually employed by the organisation itself. The others are still on contracts with the Town Hall. The organisation has a Chief Executive, a central administration and 5 sections each with a separate head:

Markets and Events

Graphics and Design

Online Management

Marketing

Tourist Services

The Tourist Services Section offers the following: tourist information and tickets for events, sightseeing, hotel reservation and packages for stays in Wiesbaden. The Graphic and Design Section also offers services to the other departments of the Town Hall.

Marketing is done not only locally, but also internationally to attract visitors from USA, Russia, Japan and others, concentrating on business visitors. An overseeing role is performed by the Lord Mayor together

with a representative of Wiesbaden Town Hall and the City Council portfolio holder for Economic and Human Resources. Together they scrutinise the workings of the organisation. The annual operational budget of WM is 315.000 euro provided by the Town Hall. WM also raises additional money through its activities.

### **Relationships with Organisations relevant to Wiesbaden Marketing**

WM works together with a whole host of other organisations in its endeavour to market Wiesbaden. Amongst these are the Historical German Towns Association, the Rheingau-Taunus-Main Tourism Stand at the Tourism Fair Berlin, The Hessen Tourism Association, the Hessen Spas Association and the Economic Development and Marketing Association of Wiesbaden.

### **Brochures and leaflets produced by Wiesbaden Marketing**

Some examples (all free to the consumer):

*12 Fabulous Reason to visit Wiesbaden* (in English);

*Wiesbaden to Experience, to Discover, to Learn:*

150 pages; content divided into guided tours for different topics e.g.: 'Town Tour Round Trips', 'Historical and Literary', 'Town History', 'Famous Personalities', 'Architecture', 'The Spa Experience', 'Churches and Cemeteries', 'Monuments and Palaces', 'Wiesbaden' Gourmet Delights', 'Art and Museums', 'Nature and Culture'.

*Wiesbaden Events 2012 July–Dec:*

List of all the Events taking place in Wiesbaden over a six-month period

*Hotels and B&B:*

Includes detailed description with words and symbols, category, contact details and prices.

There are many more brochures and leaflets for individual events which one finds in the Tourist Information Office and Hotels.

### **Summary**

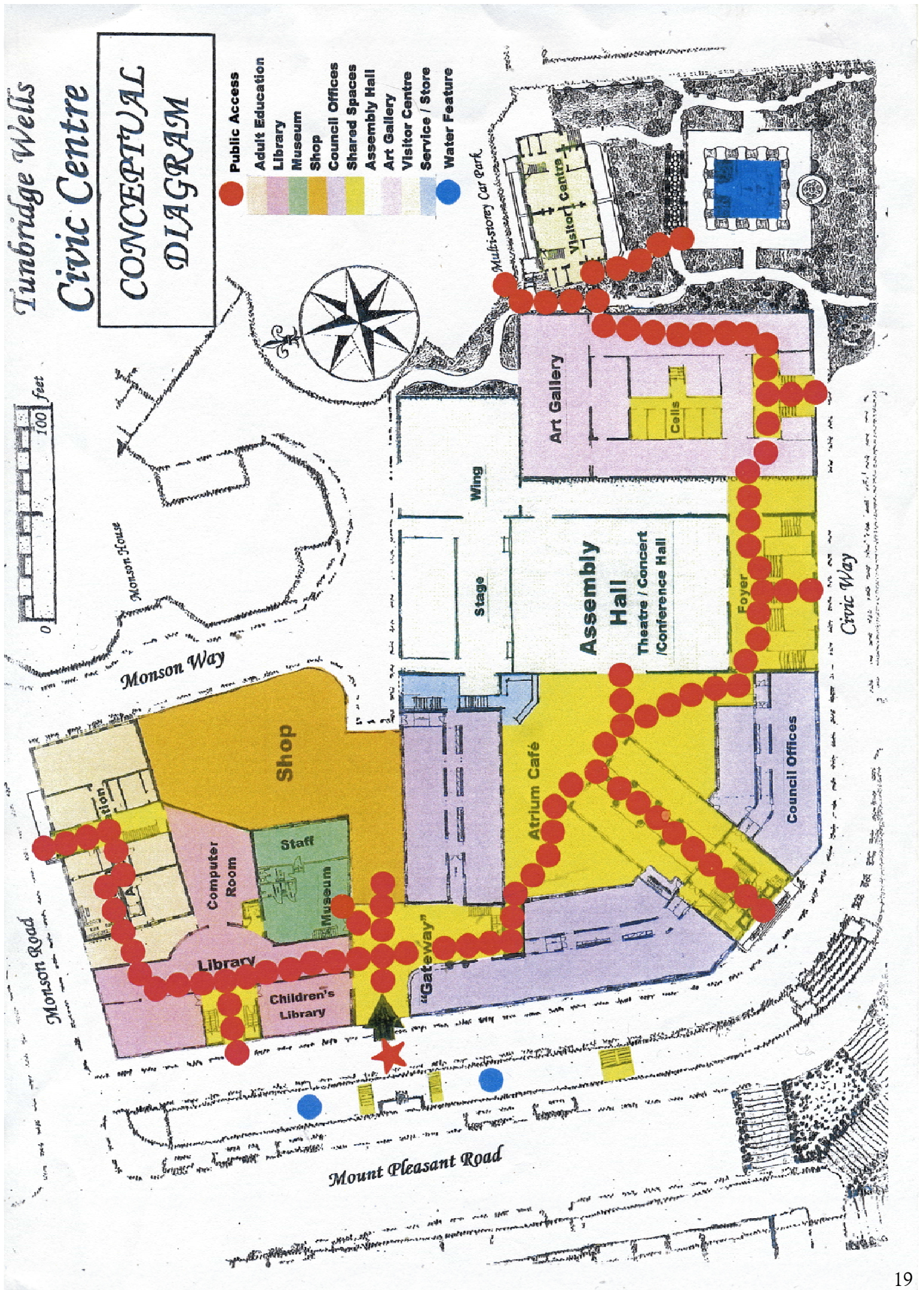
Wiesbaden, the capital of Hessen, is managed by elected councillors, but the Lord Mayor — (a very important person) — has the dual role of Lord Mayor as well as Chief Executive. The town has developed its potential and is continuing to work hard to sustain it through marketing. This development took place only after the Town Management decided to work on a vision and create the means to achieve the vision. They were proud to announce in their *2011 Report on Tourism* that they had reached the one millionth overnight stay in the town for a single year. They work hard to be a Conference Centre and also a place to stay for visitors to the hugely successful Rheingau Music Festival. They run a very popular Wine Festival every August and the annual Christmas Market in December along with many other markets and festivals throughout the year.

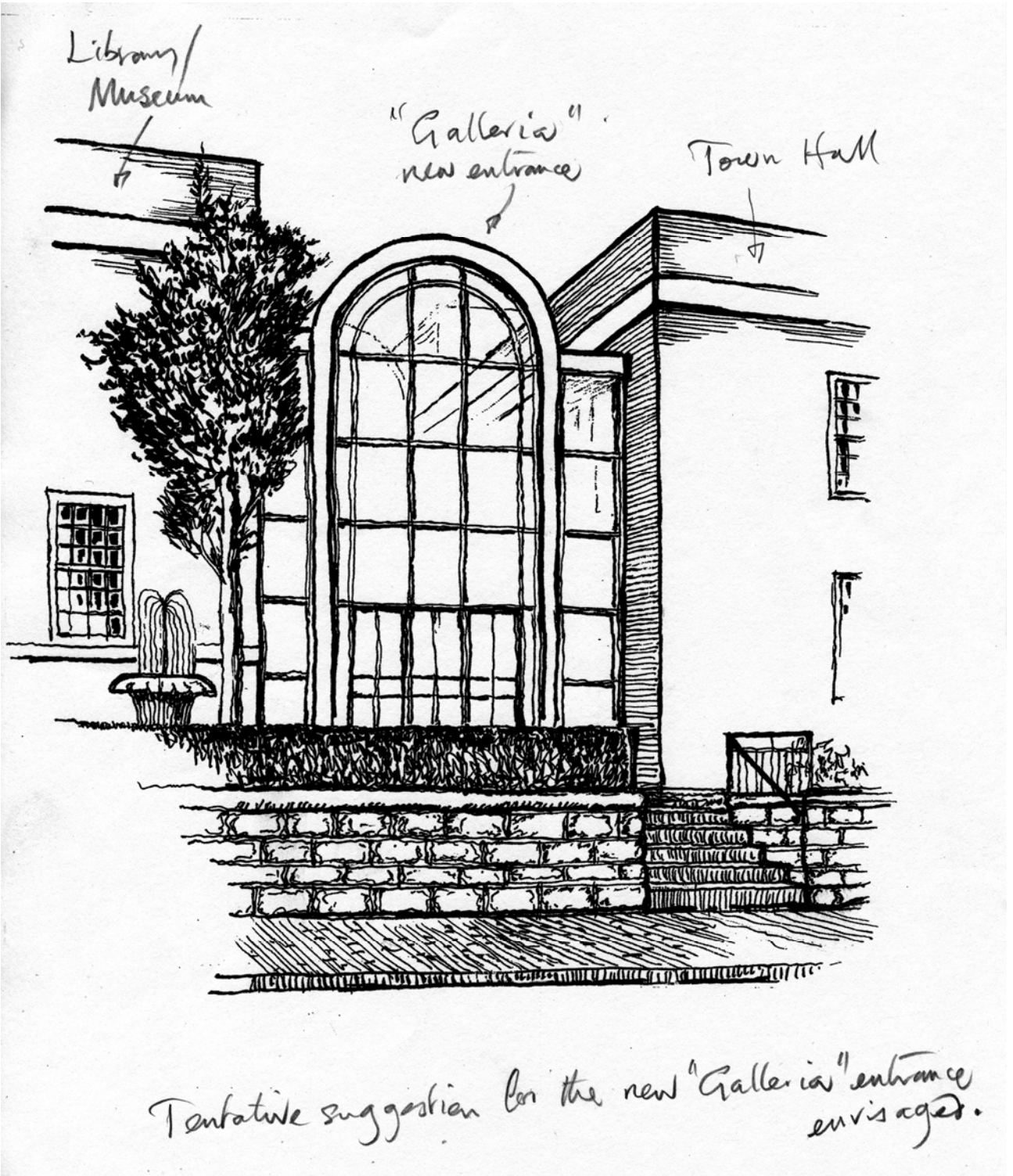
*Dr Dorothea Holman*

Member of the Tourism, Culture and Leisure group of the RTW Town Forum

December 2012

Conceptual diagrams of rearranged layout for Civic Centre





## Possible Items for inclusion in Civic Centre redesign brief with reference to tourism

### 1. Available/reserved space:

Interested parties to prescribe as prior exercise how much floor space they can release, or must be kept and redesigned to specified standards to deliver statutory and civic service functions ie TWBC Councillors/staff; police (some form of retained presence within TW is desirable); Museum and art gallery; KCC library; Adult Education Centre. Surveys will need to identify potential of all currently unused spaces indoors and outside and ways of linking them at different levels and the special architectural features that need to be preserved.

### 2. Tourism provision

As regards cultural and other facilities attractive to tourists (also benefiting local people) provision for following uses:

- Imaginative display rooms/walks and activity space for Museum special costumes and Tunbridge Ware collections and for on site storage of selected reference items , plus associated educational areas with continuous videos and special craft making demonstrations at set times. Childrens studies area;
- Display space for “local history” artefacts eg pictures, early pharmacy equipment, cricketing materials, farm implements, past shop signs, police and crime paraphernalia, bath chair and sedan chair. Possibly a chronological( educational) walk along the galleria;
- Display space for Victorian toys collection and lighting up of much loved dolls house maybe enhanced with other material as a special Victorian childhood room(or see below re Decimus Burton houses). Could include workhouse paraphernalia;
- Display space for a rethought natural history museum, linking its local contents imaginatively with maps and pictures of Borough habitats where they can be seen *in situ*;
- Art Gallery as specified by Museum maybe with retail space for selling local art products with contact lists of local artists, either to view working studios or commission work;
- Welcoming new galleria entrance designed and deliverable as advance project before rest of refurbishment for use by both tourists and local people. Located to link Town Hall and Museum blocks, with space for changing displays and community information bays around its walls. Disabled access lifts to all floors;
- “National Gallery” style heritage shop by the entrance/exit for browsing books, stationery, maps and selected memorabilia about Tunbridge Wells. Provision for self service call-up information on computers ranging from availability of car park spaces and local accommodation to location of archives, with capability to print out maps, timetables, passes, tickets;
- Extra backstage space for Assembly Hall;
- Ground floor pillared arcade or grand “galleria” as walk through area serving whole complex of town hall, museum, library, art gallery, education centre, assembly hall, former court and former police station each of which would also retain their own outside entrances. This galleria should be designed as the “signature feature” space and be of sufficient architectural interest to be worth tourists coming to see in its own right. Possibly use a spa water theme;

- provision for specified number of retail booths and craft working display areas eg Tunbridge Ware making;
- Refreshment facilities close to Assembly Hall toilets;
- Redesigned gardens along the frontage accessible to the public to sit under trees. Possibly able to accommodate public art exhibitions etc;
- Dignified appropriate use of the listed Decimus Burton houses eg as small ancillary museums and their forecourt eg as garden with water feature;
- Possible use of flat roofs for open air organic gardens(see AXA roof) tea room and town viewing platform;
- Inclusion of at least one significant water feature indoors as well as out.

### 3. **Indirect cultural/tourism provision**

- Conference facilities would draw more visitors to the town. Explore possibility of facilitating use of “down time” in the Council Chamber for major conferences associated with smaller adjoining rooms for workshops all fully equipped with modern working technology;
- Many tourist and leisure facilities are provided by community organisations. Rooms and other open spaces should be made available to them, for meetings, conferences, displays, film shows including in the evenings;
- Local studies and genealogy using the internet are now a major leisure pursuit. Consider how material from KCC, TWBC and others could be associated in reformatted reference library and local studies centre run by TWBC with cutting edge equipment;
- adaptations to permit some use of Council Chamber/Mayor’s Parlour for civil weddings;
- If space available in AEC, some integrated groups of facilities for shared services and educational/cultural/research usage;
- language IT booths for overseas students/visitors/employees.

Some other considerations will be use of sub-basements including voids under Library building, eg for storage, archives, common services, accessibility for delivery of bulky items, waste disposal and recycling; security for all sections at all times including selective evening or weekend usage: ways of incorporating new or about to be installed lifts at AEC and Library and existing Town Hall lift; access to selective parking; access to available adjoining facilities eg extensive toilets and Bar in Assembly Hall.