



Tunbridge Wells Town Plan Advisory Panel

Report and Recommendations



Presented to
TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL
July 2012

FOREWORD

It is now around eight months since I set up the Tunbridge Wells Town Plan Panel with the purpose of better informing the debate on the future development of the town. Some finger crossing was needed at first since the exercise was new to all those involved, and required some pretty basic blue sky thinking. However, I am delighted that we are now able to publish our views, based on the consensus of the majority of the Panel members. Looking back, I feel privileged to have been part of a group of people who have shown such dedication and have given up so much of their time to the task.

There will be those, no doubt, who will question the composition of the Panel and indeed its competence or mandate for doing this work. The choice of members was initially mine, and whilst I made every effort to ensure a balanced selection of skills and demographics, I was always aware that this could never be entirely perfect, and would be inevitably open to challenge. Despite this, however, I remain confident that the result is a valid and useful contribution to the consultation process. In particular, the thinking has been from the bottom up, starting with a clean sheet and few pre-conceived ideas. It is probable that the result may not be seen as dramatic, but I am convinced that it will prove to be of considerable significance in further informing the Borough Council's consultation on the Tunbridge Wells town centre plan.

As to the report itself, it may come as little surprise to some that the recommendations appear essentially conservative, whilst still promoting change whenever and wherever that is deemed appropriate. The expression "evolutionary rather than revolutionary" comes to mind. The Report contains a full summary of our findings, but I would perhaps pick out three issues for special interest. Firstly, the view that Tunbridge Wells is essentially a "destination town". In other words, it is a place to visit and cherish as well as a great place in which to live and work. It is not seen as a traditional market town, nor as a major shopping centre, but rather as a place full of interest and diversity. Secondly, the controversial issue of the civic centre area is clearly addressed. Whilst not proposing a detailed solution, the clear view is expressed that this part of the town should remain available for public use and should represent the beating heart of the community. There was no appetite for major retail in this area, although the possibility of larger stores elsewhere in the town is not completely excluded. Thirdly, I would pick out the innovative idea of incorporating the protection of views within the planning framework. There are so many stunning aspects within and towards the town, and giving consideration to the impact on these during the planning process could help reduce the risk of major planning 'faux pas' in the future.

As to the future itself, this Report will form part of the Council's consultation process. It recommends a framework for the development of a town plan and is not a plan in itself, the production of which would be a matter for qualified experts. It is to the Council that further comments, suggestions, agreements or disagreements should be made.

Additionally, I am extremely pleased that Panel members have agreed to continue to meet, albeit on a less frequent basis, and may consider further input into the planning process at a later date should that be deemed appropriate. Furthermore, I would hope that the Panel might continue in existence over the years, either to consider specific projects or to take part in future consultations concerning the development of the town. It has built up a degree of expertise and knowledge from ground zero, is focused on planning issues, and whilst individual members may come and go, I believe it would be to the Town's benefit to retain this useful sounding board if at all possible.

The Panel was sponsored by the Council when I was the Council's leader, but is now completely independent of it, and I would like once again to express my huge thanks to its independent members who have given of their time and expertise so freely over the past months.

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1. BACKGROUND AND ADMINISTRATION

1.1 Tunbridge Wells Town Plan Advisory Panel (TWTPAP)

The Tunbridge Wells Town Plan Panel was established by Cllr Bob Atwood, then Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council on 7 November 2011. Its terms of reference were agreed on 7th December 2011 and are attached in full as Appendix A to this report.

TWTPAP was conceived as an independent consultative and advisory committee, whose objective is to influence the physical construct of Royal Tunbridge Wells, including the purpose, use, appearance and disposition of buildings, public spaces, roads and infrastructure, taking into account the aspirations and expectations of those living in, working in and visiting the town.

It should be acknowledged that this was a bold and positive step on the part of Cllr Atwood, at a time when there was much confusion regarding the future of the Civic Complex. It established a calmer atmosphere in which to consider all the factors affecting the future of the town.

TWTPAP was encouraged to act quickly in order to input into the formal planning process required for the Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP). It was made clear that its suggestions would rank equally with other consultees in the statutory process.

Council officers provided Panel Members with the following background materials:

- Maps showing proposed “quarters” and other features and draft proposals
- A list of studies that had been undertaken including:
 - Retail and Leisure Study
 - Employment Land Review
 - Conservation Area Appraisal
 - Urban Parking Strategy

Some observations relating to these documents are contained in Section 4 of this report and take account of the work of the four sub groups listed in Section 5.

The Panel was given the right to publish its recommendations directly to the public domain as well as putting its suggestions to the Borough Council.

Membership of the Panel was intended to combine a wide breadth of views, experiences and expertise. A list of the members was published on the Council’s website and is attached to this report as Appendix B. The terms of reference provide for the panel to vote on its proposed actions, decisions being made by a simple majority and a quorum comprising 50% of members. Given the deliberately wide breadth of views built into the membership of the panel it was not expected that there would be unanimity of opinion on every point of detail. This has proved to be the case.

VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS REPORT ARE EXPRESSED ON BEHALF OF THE PANEL AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF INDIVIDUALS NOR THE ORGANISATIONS TO WHOM THEY MAY BE CONNECTED

1.2 Town Centre Area Action Plan (TCAAP)

The Panel’s geographical area of interest is defined in the Terms of Reference – in essence comprising only the Town Centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells, which is covered by the TCAAP.

The official Town Centre Boundary was the subject of a Stage 2 Consultation in 2009 under the Town Centre Area Action Plan as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) for Tunbridge Wells Borough, published in 2010.

A copy of the map is attached as Appendix C.

It is acknowledged that the Town Centre area is only a small part of the whole town of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Sports facilities such as the Nevill Ground, the swimming pool at St Johns, skate boarding facilities in Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, the Boating Lake at Dunorlan Park are outside the central area, as are excellent schools, leisure facilities at Knights Park, the retail park at North Farm, the smaller retail area at St Johns and many other important features of the town.

THE TCAAP NEEDS TO BE SEEN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TOWN AS A WHOLE AND NOT VIEWED IN ISOLATION FROM ITS RESIDENTIAL HINTERLAND AND OTHER IMPORTANT FEATURES, FACILITIES AND RESOURCES.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 Town Centre Vision

Tunbridge Wells should be a place where people of all ages enjoy living, working, studying and visiting. Residents should relish its role as the historic, cultural and commercial capital of the Kent and Sussex Weald and looking forwards and outwards, act decisively to ensure that the town and its unique heritage are passed to future generations as pleasant, safe and prosperous.

The Mission Statement for each of these stakeholders could be expressed as follows:

- For residents it should seek to preserve the diversity of housing which enables families as well as individuals to reside in the heart of the town.
- For shoppers it should present a highly-differentiated eclectic variety which enhances the experiential aspects of this important leisure activity not merely the functional and mundane.
- It should develop a confident and consistent voice for tourists and visitors as the optimum place to use as a base to explore the Kentish and Sussex Weald.
- It should focus on nurturing new small businesses, particularly in the creative and high end consultancy services. For larger organisations, physical location is becoming more flexible in an online world. Tunbridge Wells should embrace the opportunity to attract new corporate offices offering the prospect of proximity to London, quality of life and access to high quality schools as our key selling points to employers, employees and prospective employees.

In the planning of the town, it is essential that the unique history and character of Tunbridge Wells as a residential spa town should be understood, and its distinction from neighbouring market towns appreciated and respected in the way that future development is considered.

We should focus on identifying and meeting the needs of the future whilst remaining mindful of and building upon the strengths of the past. Its best features should be protected and those that let it down should be remedied

2.2 Summary of Key Recommendations

The following represent the key recommendations emerging from the initial discussions and investigations of the TWTPAP:

- The future development of Tunbridge Wells should be guided by an understanding of and therefore an appreciation of the key heritage features that make it unique including topography and natural resources, residential environment, and its historic reputation as a vibrant place to live, work and visit.
- That an agreed set of key “protected views” be put to public consultation and the necessary control framework to consider the impact of development on these vistas be embraced within the TCAAP
- That the Town Centre Boundary be adjusted to include residential areas that adjoin Camden Road, and to incorporate Lansdowne Road/Calverley Park Crescent, which adjoin Calverley Road East and The Grove
- That the objectives of the TCAAP be extended to include the statement: “To protect and respect the key vistas and buildings of character that together make Royal Tunbridge Wells one of Kent’s most important heritage towns and to incorporate better planning tools to enable developments to be properly assessed and reviewed”.
- That the TCAAP document moves away from the concept of “Quarters” and adopts the more tailored approach for Tunbridge Wells – built around seven distinctive but interconnected neighbourhoods with a strong cultural and civic heart.

- To focus urgently on the reputation for congestion within the town, particularly at peak times with short-term measures (lobbying for changes in school transport policies, limiting access for HGVs at peak times, park and ride schemes) as well as a longer-term environmentally-sound and integrated strategy (train connections, public transport “hub”, cycle paths and shared space approaches).
- Do not give up hope that a potentially significant positive gain could be achieved by reinstating rail links to the south of the town via Tunbridge Wells West, even if the present national government has not yet committed to it.
- To adhere to a sympathetic palette of street furniture which assists in helping to define the “Central Spine” as well as bring to life the separate and distinct historical zones and eco-systems which define Tunbridge Wells town centre. In particular to control more robustly and expand where possible the use of red brick pavements as a defining characteristic of the town, subject of course to this investment being evaluated against other strategic initiatives and priorities on the value it contributes to the total offer.
- Develop an innovative and bold vision for the town’s retail offer. Embrace the unique topography of the town and create a differentiated retail “experience” which encompasses RVP, The Pantiles and Mount Pleasant to create an appeal which is “more than the sum of the parts”. Avoid the temptation to simply replicate what other towns and retail parks already offer.
- Instead of fearing North Farm as a potential alternative to town centre shopping, focus on making this “twin site” work in terms of ease of parking and access.
- Encourage second-rate business premises to be brought up to date, or where necessary replaced, providing a wide range of facilities to suit businesses from start-ups to major head offices whilst at the same time enhancing the aesthetic contribution these make to the town. Recognise that in an online world the combination of proximity to London and an enhanced quality of family life are key attributes which enhance the town’s opportunity in this area - but failing to deal with congestion will hold us back.
- Embrace a bolder plan to position Tunbridge Wells at the heart of the culture and leisure provision - not just for the town but for West Kent and East Sussex – as Canterbury is to East Kent so Tunbridge Wells could be for its unique catchment area.
- Recognise that the Town Hall and Civic Complex occupy a key position at the heart of the town. Whilst there will always be extreme tension between the agenda of conservation and preservation versus those that find greater inspiration in a more modern or futuristic scheme what unites people is wanting to see this as a vibrant cultural heart of the town which invokes pride, not a series of anonymous and indistinct retail ‘sheds’.
- Kick start this vision by addressing the relatively poor provision in museums and libraries, leveraging short-term opportunities to display existing collections and build up a tourism offer to create the necessary momentum for more significant additional facilities such as permanent ice rinks, refurbished Assembly Halls and well-maintained parks and common areas.
- Recognise that a critical point of difference for Tunbridge Wells is the variety and breadth of housing provision, including critically the availability of houses with gardens relatively close to the town centre area. Ensure that new housing development maintains this approach, creatively interpreted for the 21st century and does not result in over provision of flats and apartments which only really cater for the younger commuter demographic.
- Ensure that residents of new housing developments are able to live a full life in the community without reliance upon private cars.

3. HISTORY AND CONTEXT

3.1 Historical Development

Royal Tunbridge Wells is both special and unique. Its particular character derives from its unusual topography and the way in which it has developed from a spa town that people visited, to a residential town where people came to live. The understanding of this is fundamental if the town is first to be understood and in consequence appropriately developed.

Unlike other towns, Tunbridge Wells was never of defensive importance, nor placed at a strategic crossroads or river crossing. Neither did it develop around a sheep or cattle market. From the 17th century onwards, it has specifically developed as a residential spa town, with such commercial development as has been necessary to support that residential use.

The result of this evolution and heritage is that in contrast to many other towns of similar size:

- Many people continue to live in or near the town centre, including families in houses with gardens rather than a predominance of flats or single occupancy dwellings.
- The retail offer is an eclectic mix of big names and specialist traders, presented in a range of environments rather than as a single defined shopping centre
- Trees and green spaces both within the town centre boundary and adjacent to it give the town centre a light and open feel.
- There is a lively café culture, which benefits from the proximity of residents.

As a result of its unique history and topography, much of the town centre is not dominated by its retail function and it has consequently avoided the worst excesses of typical twentieth century roadway engineering that has so effectively marooned and isolated the centres of equivalently sized towns such as Maidstone and Ashford.

The town is family friendly with good schools and there are strong rail links to London and the south coast. The Common stretches into the heart of the town and, in all directions, beautiful countryside is to be found in the area around.

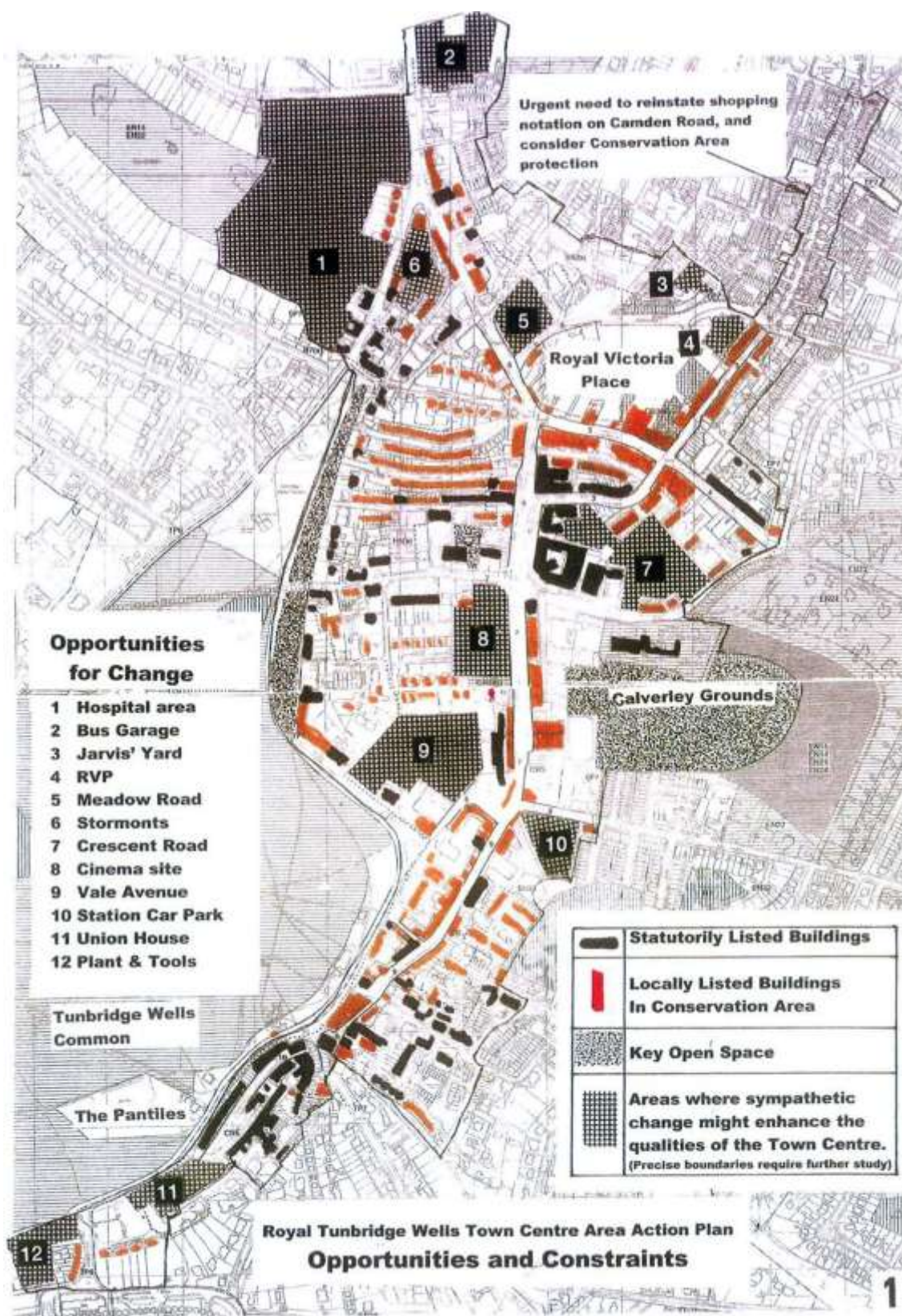
The topography of the town allows long views and vistas in different directions and the buildings offer a legible history, starting with The Pantiles, through the romantic villas and Kentish vernacular houses to the larger late 19th century and Edwardian buildings, with domes and roofscapes enlivening the skyline, culminating in the expression of civic pride in the creation of the Town Hall Complex just before World War II.

RECOMMENDATION: *The future development of Tunbridge Wells should be guided by the key features that make it unique including topography, residential environment and its place as a vibrant place to live, work and visit.*

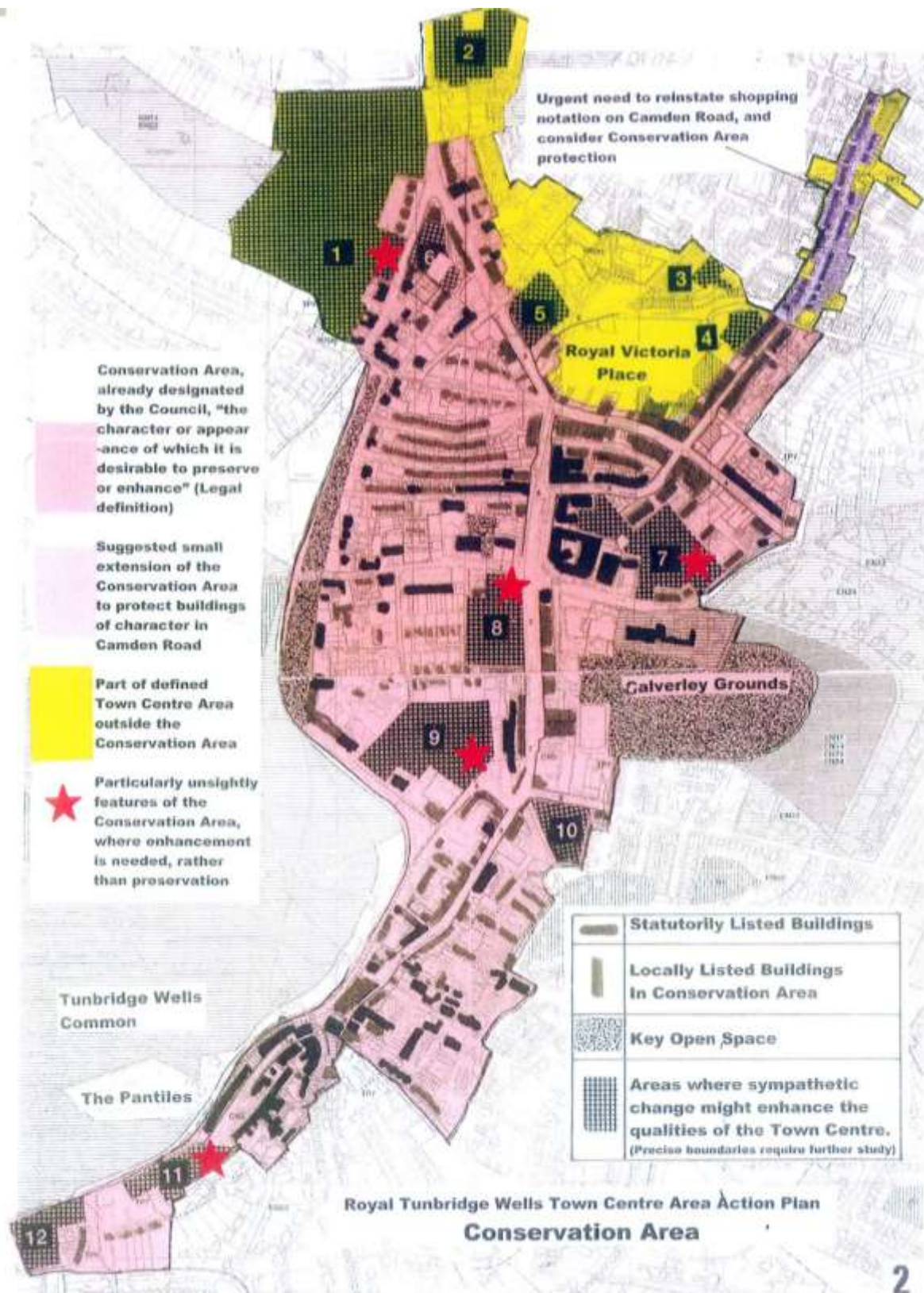
3.2 Conservation Area

Most of the town centre is rightly within a designated Conservation area, the legal definition of which is “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.”

This does not mean that the area should be frozen in aspic. On the contrary, the element of enhancement, that is to say, strengthening the qualities of the area by dealing with those features that currently let it down, is no less important than the preservation aspect.



Plan 1 shows some opportunities and constraints within the town centre. Statutorily listed buildings are shown in black and locally listed in red, and these should generally be protected and respected. Also shown are a dozen hatched areas where suitable change would be positively welcome. These and less obvious smaller opportunities for change are discussed informally in greater detail in Appendix D to this report.



The extent of the conservation area is shown in pink on plan 2.

3.3 Town Centre Vistas

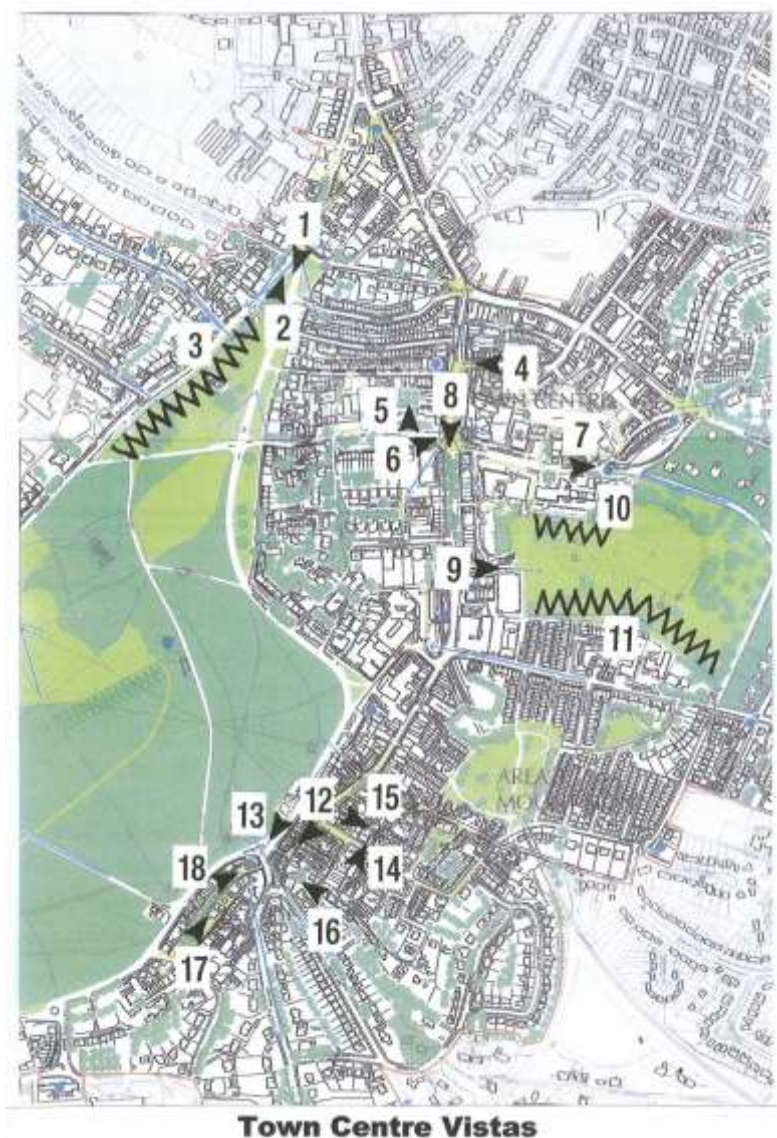
The Conservation Area Appraisal shows a number of Key Views or Vistas, which have been augmented following recent publicity.

The Panel considers that these should be given greater emphasis as part of the Town Centre Area Action Plan. This could take the form of a framework to instigate the control and assessment of major planning applications based on their impacts in key 'protected views'.

For this to work a small number of key character defining views need to be identified and their positive values explained, so that particularly high-rise proposals and their potential impacts can be properly investigated and considered in advance of the grant of consent.

The panel is keen to emphasise that this approach is not designed to halt development, merely to enable its potential consequences to be better understood at planning stage.

A plan showing where suggested views could be assessed is set out below and on the following page a number of these are included for the purpose of illustration. It is recommended that this be the subject of specific community consultation before adopting any particular set of vistas.



Sample suggested vistas – numbering refers to plan on page 10



3. Mount Ephraim (copyright. Kevin Scott Photography)



4. Portico closing the vista along Monson Road



6. Town Hall Complex



8. Mount Pleasant Hill



9. Calverley Grounds



14. Mount Sion looking towards Frog Lane



5. Trinity Gardens



17. Upper Walk - The Pantiles

RECOMMENDATION: *That an agreed set of key “protected views” be put to public consultation and the necessary control framework to consider the impact of development on these vistas be embraced within the TCAAP*

3.4 Town Centre boundary

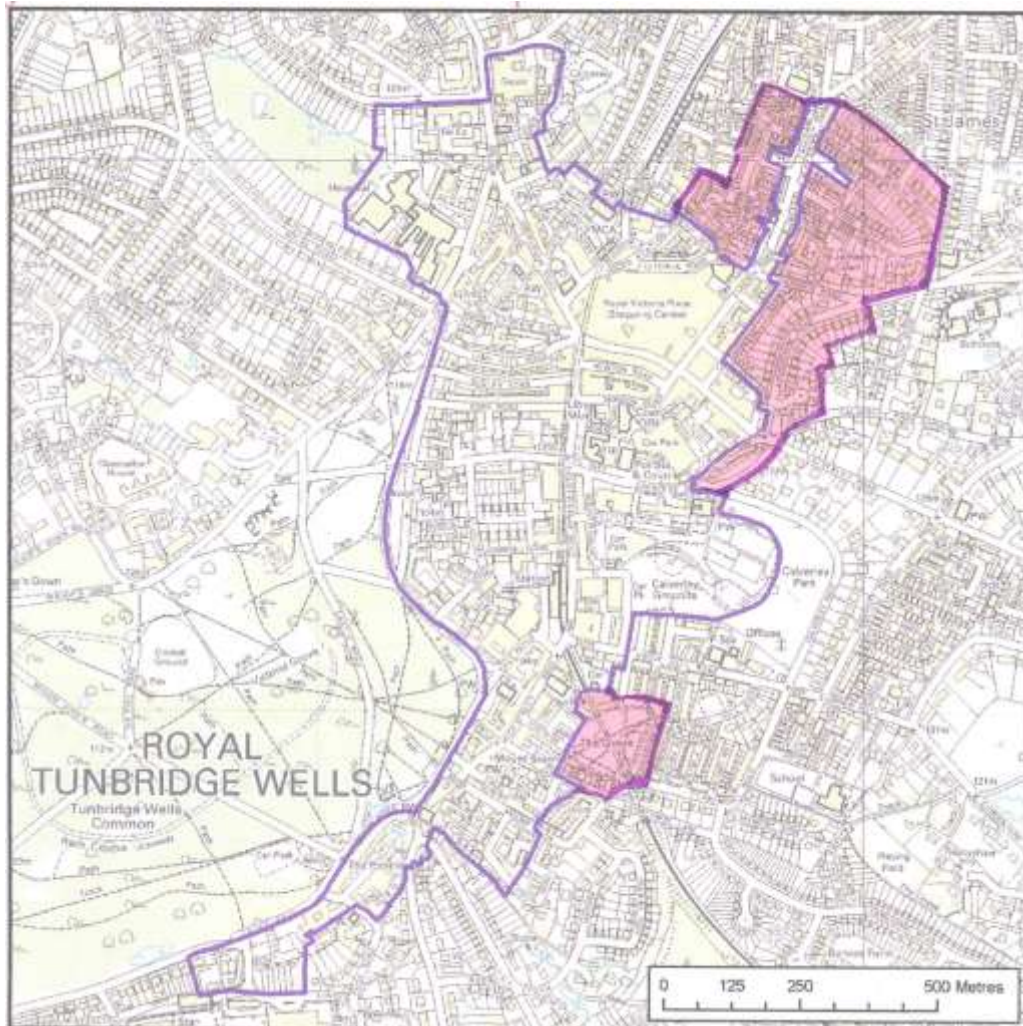
The town centre boundary was the subject of public consultation in 2009, as a result of which Calverley Grounds was added to the area. The panel feels that the Grove should be added too, both as an important Town Centre open space, and as an essential part of the “Village” area of Mount Sion.

A case for the town centre being defined as much of TN1, plus the hospital and bus garage sites was briefly discussed however, this would broaden the exercise greatly and was not considered appropriate.

The panel did however agree the importance of Tunbridge Wells being seen as a series of interdependent eco-systems. The panel considers it essential that each distinct “zone” in the town centre is considered as such. This is achieved within the current boundary for example by including the residential “Village” area of the Grove adjoining the High Street .

Using the same logic the Panel identified opportunities for the boundary to be marginally extended to include the villas and cottages that adjoin Camden Road. Similarly, Lansdowne Road and Calverley Park Crescent, which adjoin Calverley Road East, are important and interdependent components of neighbouring retail areas.

The effect of including these areas would re-define the Town Centre Boundary as shown overleaf, with suggested additions shown in pink:



RECOMMENDATION: That the Town Centre Boundary be adjusted to include The Grove, together with residential areas that adjoin Camden Road, and to incorporate Lansdowne Road and Calverley Park Crescent, which adjoin Calverley Road East.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON TWBC'S DRAFT TOWN CENTRE PLAN

4.1 Overall objectives

The Council's stated objectives for Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre are as follows and are supported by the Panel.

- To improve linkages between different areas of the town centre and to improve the street scene and public realm, including with the provision of street furniture and green infrastructure, to promote wellbeing and a sense of place.
- To promote the town centre as an attractive and thriving place for retail and leisure (including the night-time economy).
- To actively promote the regeneration of certain vacant, derelict and rundown sites that currently detract from the town centre and surrounding area.
- To promote and improve access to the town's cultural, tourism and amenity attractions.
- To reduce traffic congestion in the town centre and beyond and to encourage alternative modes of transport- for example, buses, cycling and walking.

RECOMMENDATION: *The Panel recommends adding a further objective:*

"To protect and respect the key vistas and buildings of character that together make Royal Tunbridge Wells one of Kent's most important heritage towns".

4.2 "Town Quarters"

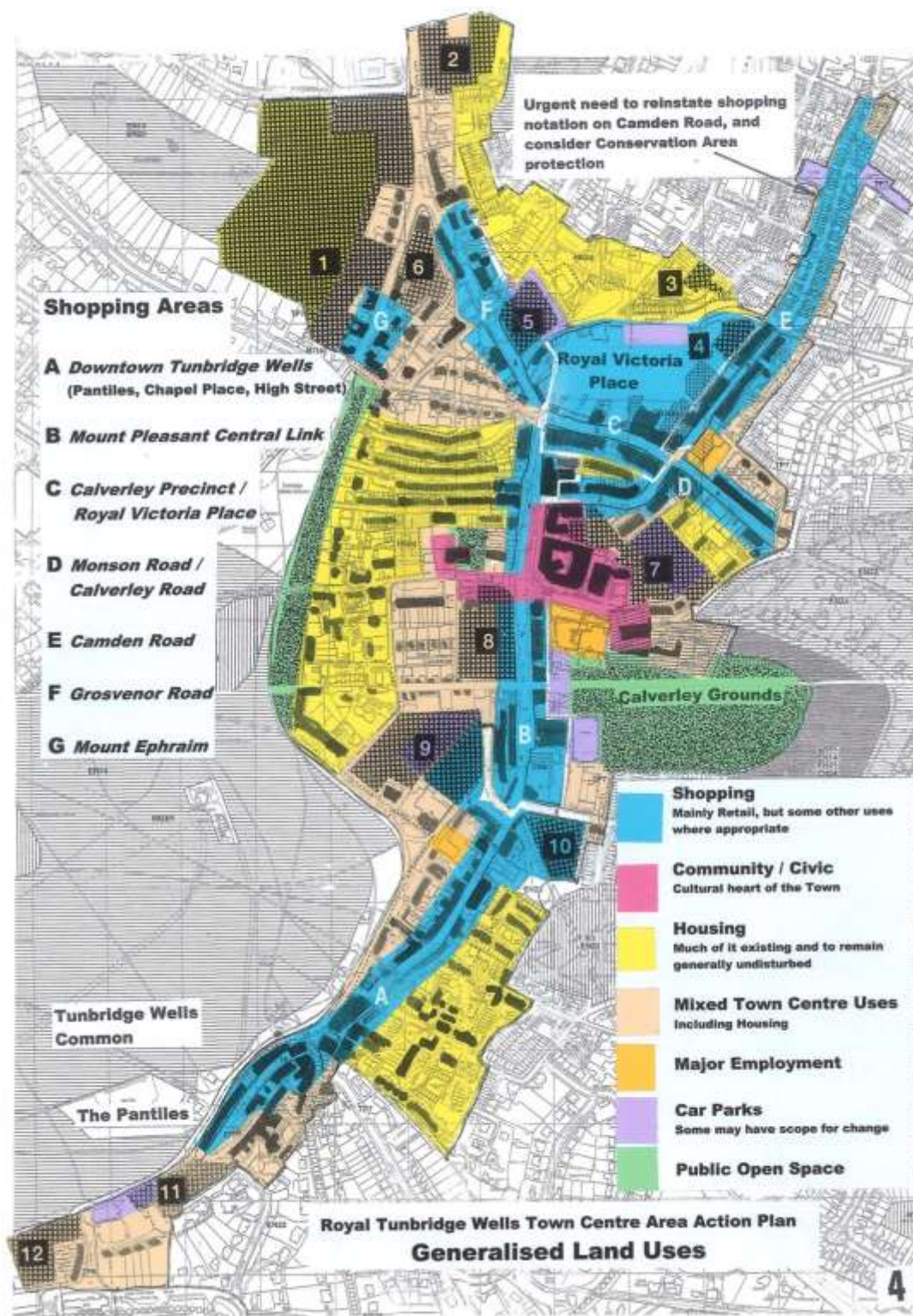
The Panel challenges the concept of "Town Quarters" which is the terminology that has been chosen to express how areas of the town might be identified for future development.

This approach does not adequately express the uniqueness of Tunbridge Wells and the interdependent way in which shopping, business and residential communities co-exist which is a defining part of the Town.

There is a danger that the Town Quarters concept therefore encourages a "me too" planning framework which might result in a replication of what other towns already have.

For example - the "Retail Quarter" as proposed is confined to the top part of the town around Calverley Road. Tunbridge Wells has a linear shopping centre that extends from Camden and Grosvenor Roads in the north to The Pantiles in the south and all are essential to the town's "brand" and to the varied shopping experience that the town offers.

The Panel has developed an alternative approach, set out in **Plan 4** overleaf:



This approach highlights seven distinctive but generally interconnected shopping areas, together with a central cultural and civic heart. This generalised land use plan also highlights the importance of housing in Tunbridge Wells’ town centre, a feature that the Panel is keen to retain and strengthen.

RECOMMENDATION: That the TCAAP document moves away from the concept of “Quarters” and adopts the more tailored approach build around seven distinctive but interconnected neighbourhoods with a strong cultural and civic heart.

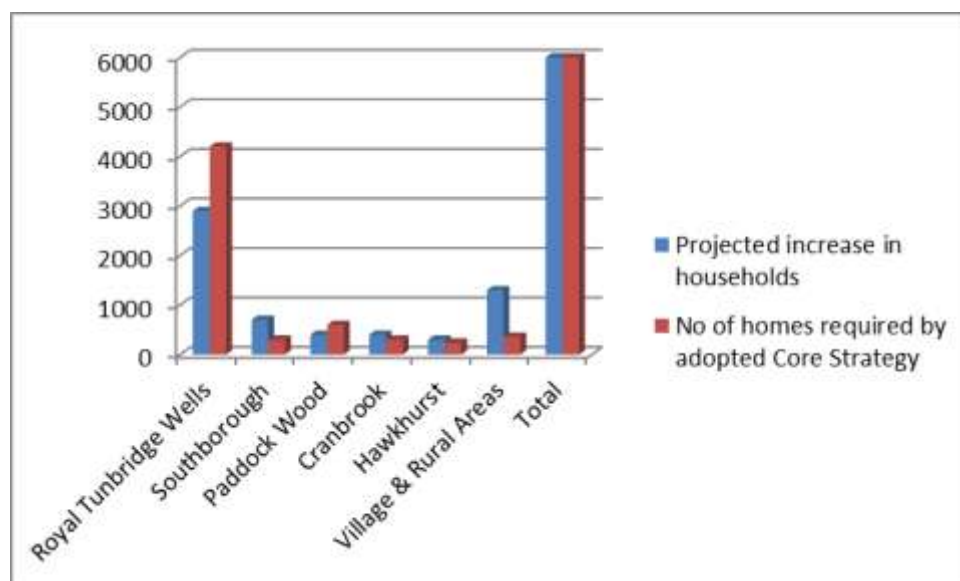
4.3 Residential development

On the subject of residential development, although no specific requirement is laid down for the town centre, the overall figure for the whole Borough in the adopted Core Strategy is 6,000 dwellings over the plan period. The breakdown of these within different settlements across the Borough is shown on the following table.

Settlement	Projected increase in households	No. homes required by adopted Core Strategy	Does Core Strategy distribution meet projected increase in households?
Royal Tunbridge Wells	2,900	4,200	Yes (1,300 over)
Southborough	700	300	No (400 under)
Paddock Wood	400	600	Yes (200 over)
Cranbrook	400	300	No (100 under)
Hawkhurst	300	240	No (60 under)
Villages and Rural Areas	1,300	360	No (940 under)
Total:	6,000	6,000	

Source: TWBC Core Strategy Review, May 2011 Table 3 Page 12

From this it will be seen that there is a potential mismatch between housing need and housing provision in all of the main settlements. In particular, Royal Tunbridge Wells appears to be overprovided, while the Villages and Rural Areas appear to be under-provided, compared with their stated need in terms of the projected increase in households.



Meanwhile, significant new housing provision has been suggested in the site specific opportunities for change listed at the end of this report and the overall figure has been reduced by recent completions, many near the town centre.

The panel suggests that steps are taken to better align residential provision with need, within that overall figure, when specific site allocations are made.

4.4 Retail development

On shopping floor space, the Core Strategy is specific in giving a figure of 26,236 sq.m net of comparison floor space across the Borough by 2017, unless a different need is identified through a future retail study.

This last provision is a wise one in a fast-changing retail environment, where long established retail brands are shutting up shop and where the retail expansion of internet and mobile phone shopping adds to the uncertainties of economic downturn.

The figure in the Core Strategy was based upon a study of 2006 by Colliers CRE which updated work done by them in 1999 and 2003.

However, in January 2011 Cushman and Wakefield came up with a further report in which they advocated the following:-

Tunbridge Wells Comparison Goods Capacity Forecasts

Centre	2011 (sqm net)	2012 (sqm net)	2012 (sqm net)	2026 (sqm net)
Town Centre (Scenario 1)	1,574	9,033	23,831	44,583
Town Centre (Scenario 2)	1,574	19,479	36,365	60,048
Retail Warehouses (Scenario 1)	-	1,256	10,242	23,225
Retail Warehouses (Scenario 2)	-	-	1,719	12,173
Total (Scenario 1)	1,574	10,289	34,073	67,808
Total (Scenario 2)	1,574	19,479	38,084	72,221

Based upon this, Council officers have presented the following as the quantitative use requirements for comparison retailing (ie non-food) in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre:-

Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre – Quantitative Use Requirements

A1 Retail Comparison	<u>Baseline scenario</u> – 45,000 sqm (net) (To include an 8,000 to 10,000 sqm (gross) anchor department store on two to three levels)
	<u>Town Centre Uplift scenario</u> – 60,048sqm (net) (To include an 8,000-10,000 sqm anchor department store)

The panel believes that the current economic crisis alongside pressures on retailers from online and mobile shopping alternatives compromise even the short term projections for this requirement and that these figures should not be relied upon in the TCAAP.

The Panel agreed early in its discussion process that Tunbridge Wells should not look to compete directly on large scale retail activity with the likes of Bluewater and Lakeside, or attempt to replicate what other towns offer. Rather, it should work on its own differentiated shopping experience that encourages uses of the entire town centre, not just the RVP/ Calverley Road hub.

Also, it should embrace a complementary position in relation to the North Farm Retail Park. In this regard the panel does not feel that there is a need to consider new major retail development or anchor stores in the Town Centre.

More recent reports – such as that presented to the Government by Mary Portas are likely to provide valuable guidance in respect of short term priorities and creative strategies for Tunbridge Wells.

4.5 Office development

The Panel agrees with the approach in the Council's Quantitative Use requirement schedule, namely "current level to be maintained and selective replacement and redevelopment of existing stock – no net loss".

However, expert opinion within the Panel rates some of the existing stock, such as Union House, as poor by modern standards and the replacement of 1960s and 70s blocks is generally desirable. This approach, where possible is desirable on visual grounds also.

The encouragement of creative industries in premises that may not be suitable for more conventional office work could be helpful both in finding uses for buildings of character and for the cultural image of the town.

In particular the panel recommends that greater emphasis be placed on the specific requirements of small high end service based businesses and specialist retailers.

Whilst plans to convert existing residential property for office use should be treated with extreme caution, providing a range of highly flexible environments that allow businesses to grow at their own pace plays to the likely opportunity of the demographic of Tunbridge Wells residents.

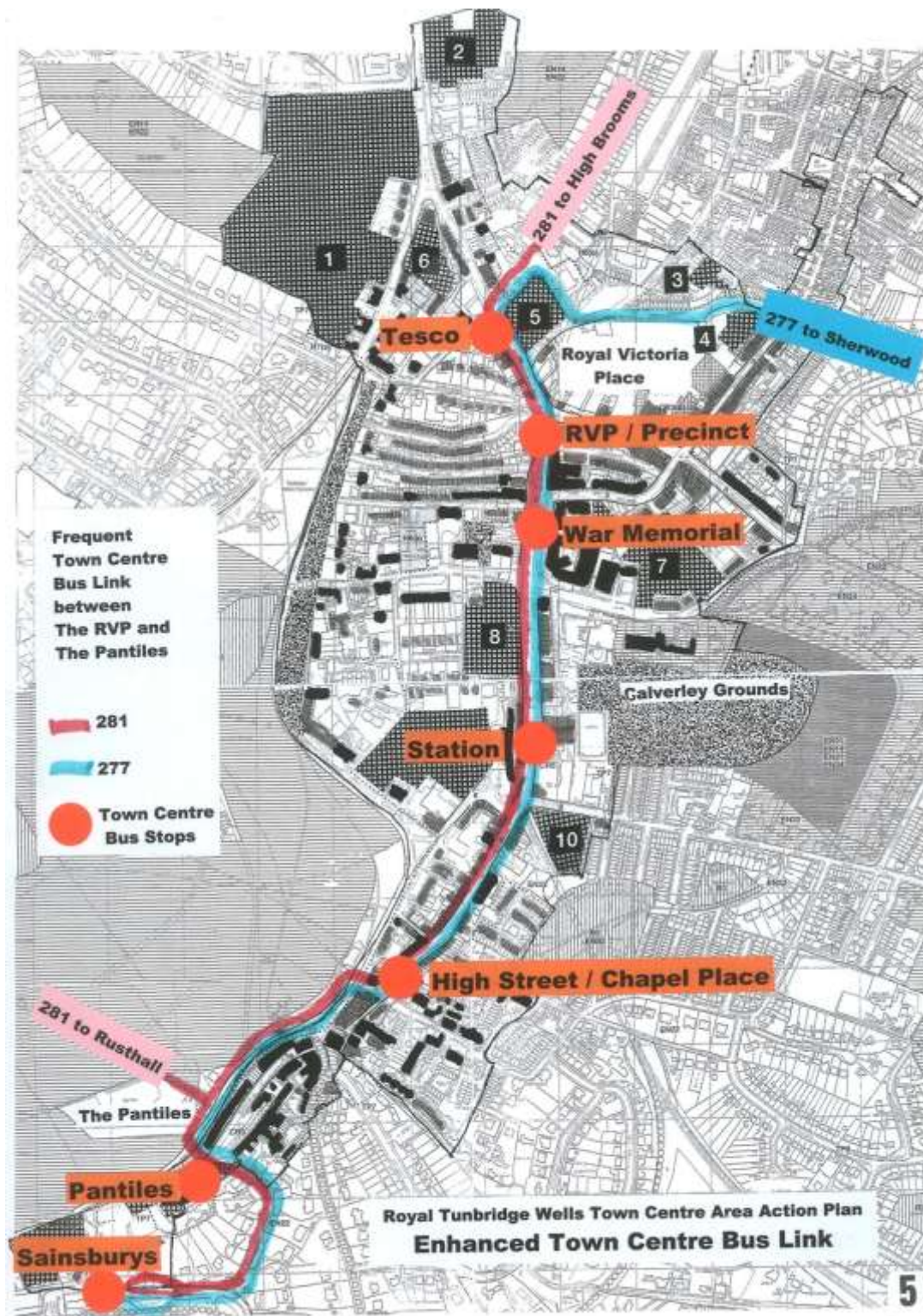
There is a growing trend in an online business environment for physical location to be a secondary consideration and this trend is likely to continue. This creates a potential opportunity for Tunbridge Wells - allowing the town to capitalise on the benefits it allows employers to provide (proximity to London, healthy and pleasant environment, better work life balance and very strong educational provision).

To achieve this however requires more than an appropriate planning framework. The town must address its reputation for being change averse, not being as welcoming and encouraging to businesses as alternative locations and addressing concerns relating to traffic congestion. Other authorities are actively courting businesses with modern bespoke facilities and our own pitch must be commercially attractive as well as aesthetically pleasing to stand any chance of success.

4.6 Transport and Parking

Traffic congestion is a major concern. There is anecdotal evidence that the town's reputation in this regard is turning business away. There are no easy solutions and the panel does not advocate progressing planning changes that have the potential to make the situation worse without an integrated traffic management plan, properly tried and tested in advance of permanent implementation.

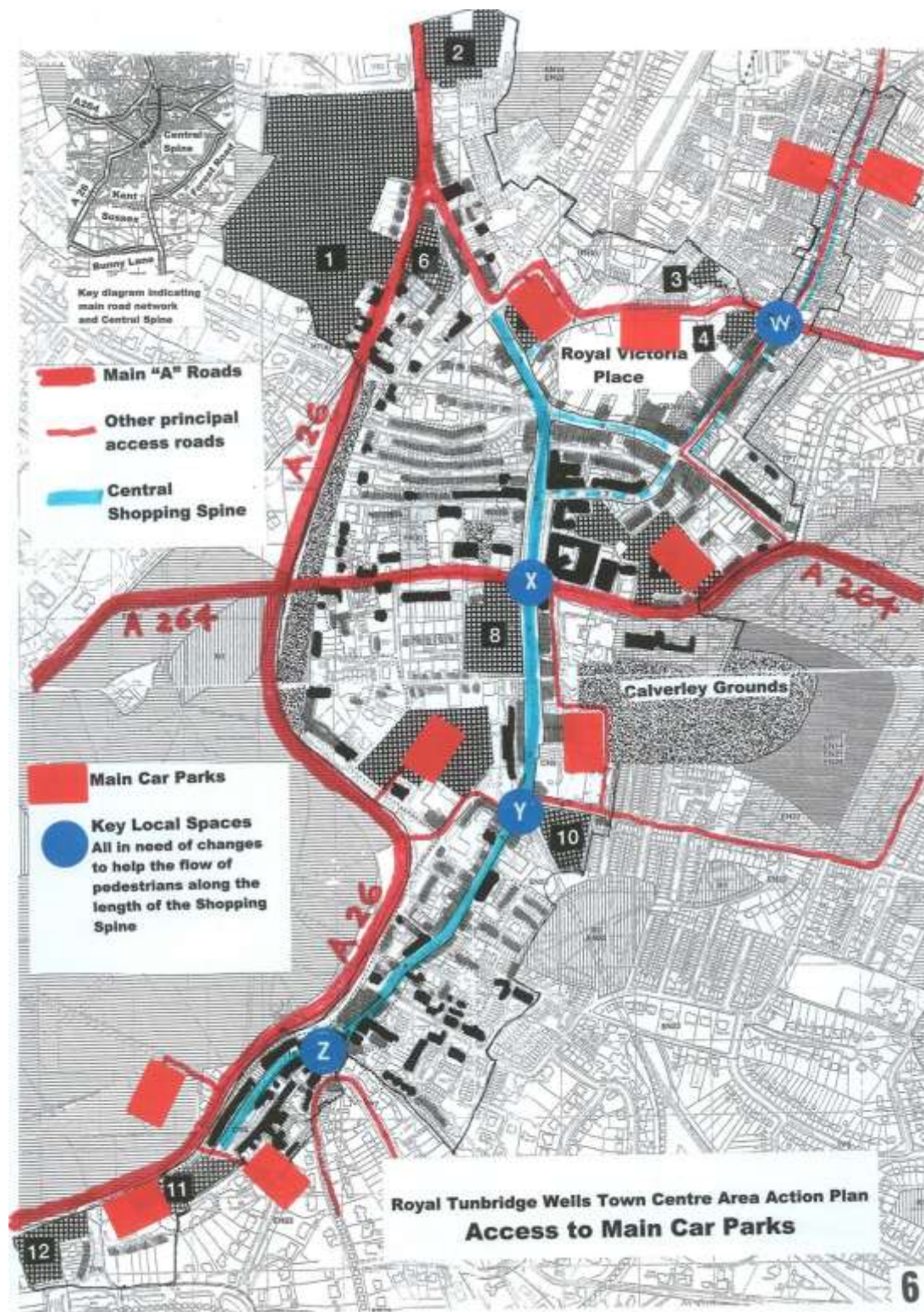
Given the linear nature of the town centre, an efficient transport link between the top and bottom ends of the town is clearly of importance. **Plan 5** shows one simple short-term idea for making use of the existing 281 and 277 services to provide a frequent and reliable town centre bus link. Some slight re-routing is suggested to facilitate this.



It should be noted however that in order fully to deliver the vision for the town a differentiated transport experience unique to the town would be the optimum solution.

Given current financial constraints the panel is realistic about the prospect of radical solutions like trams on Mount Pleasant. As a minimum however a short term transport link should be visibly differentiated from other services to make it less intimidating and more easily accessible to non-residents, both regular shoppers from within and outside of the normal retail catchment area, and tourists.

Parking is also an important issue and **Plan 6** shows car parks and a road network for the town centre.



The RTW Urban Parking Strategy looks at each of these and other car parks in detail.

Wherever possible, car parks should be accessible from the main routes, rather than from shopping areas with heavy pedestrian footfalls.

The panel recommends that “Pay on Exit” should be seriously explored as the basis for all sites but as a minimum for the main multi-storey car park provision within the town. This would have the desirable outcome of encouraging visitors and shoppers to venture further away from the RVP and Calverley Road “hub” without finding themselves stranded with a pre-determined time limit on their parking about to expire.

Individual panel members have suggested that the long term requirement for public parking at the Great Hall could be reviewed – particularly in the light of improvements to the facilities provided by the re-opening of Morrisons.

On the one hand, the Great Hall car park encourages vehicles into an area from which it could be argued public vehicular access should generally be deterred. On the other hand, maintaining the centre of town as a convenient and attractive destination is vital and this is currently achieved both through locations like the Great Hall and through flexible short term free parking in the side streets around the Pantiles and Common.

These contradictory opinions need to be balanced when considering medium term strategies in respect of town centre parking. In particular the temptation to start with a one-dimensional strategy – for example, charging for on street parking should be resisted.

The panel recognises the historic importance that the railway has made to the life, development and prosperity of Tunbridge Wells. The continued non-stop train services from High Brooms to London at peak hours are significant to maintain as these enable residents to seek high quality and varied employment in London and elsewhere which might not be available locally, bringing wealth into the town.

Improvement of rail links to the natural hinterland south of Tunbridge Wells, especially Crowborough, an expanded town which is a natural satellite to Tunbridge Wells is seen as desirable. Reinstatement of rail links via Tunbridge Wells West (severed only in 1985) would seem a target worth pursuing in a period of unprecedented growth in rail travel. Long term reconnection to Lewes and Brighton would tie Tunbridge Wells into the large South Coast population where road connections are presently fairly poor.

The panel would specifically discourage the development of new one way road systems. In London and Ashford, similar urban gyratories of one way systems have created racetracks that are now being dismantled.

4.7 Shared Space

It was clear from panel discussion that the concept of “Shared Space” is not universally supported from a conceptual point of view. This in itself suggests that any plan to further embrace the concept needs to be the subject of extensive consultation with all key stakeholder representatives and probably needs to be thoroughly tested in practice before being wholeheartedly embraced.

This said, it is clear that a “Central Spine” runs through Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre from north to south, linking Royal Victoria Place with The Pantiles. This spine could benefit from being made more distinctly defined, with three improved crossings and, possibly drawing upon the experience of the “Shared Space” concept that has been tried at Ashford and elsewhere.

The Five Ways Bus Gateway was put in place some years ago and has proved partially successful in terms of pedestrian movements. However, it is not properly enforced, and its conversion to a shared space would seem a relatively modest step. This could



be the ideal opportunity to progress with this concept incrementally and build confidence and acceptability amongst any sceptical stakeholder groups constructively.

This could be extended to include the area between the Post Office and Fenwicks with a re-arrangement of the present one-way system. Further phases might then be considered for experimental treatment too if these initial forays prove popular.

4.8 “Key Local Spaces”

In addition to the Five Ways Bus Gateway discussed above, the Council’s “Town Centre Quarters” Plan identified three other “Key Local Spaces” – all of which are road intersections along the central spine that could be made more pedestrian-friendly.

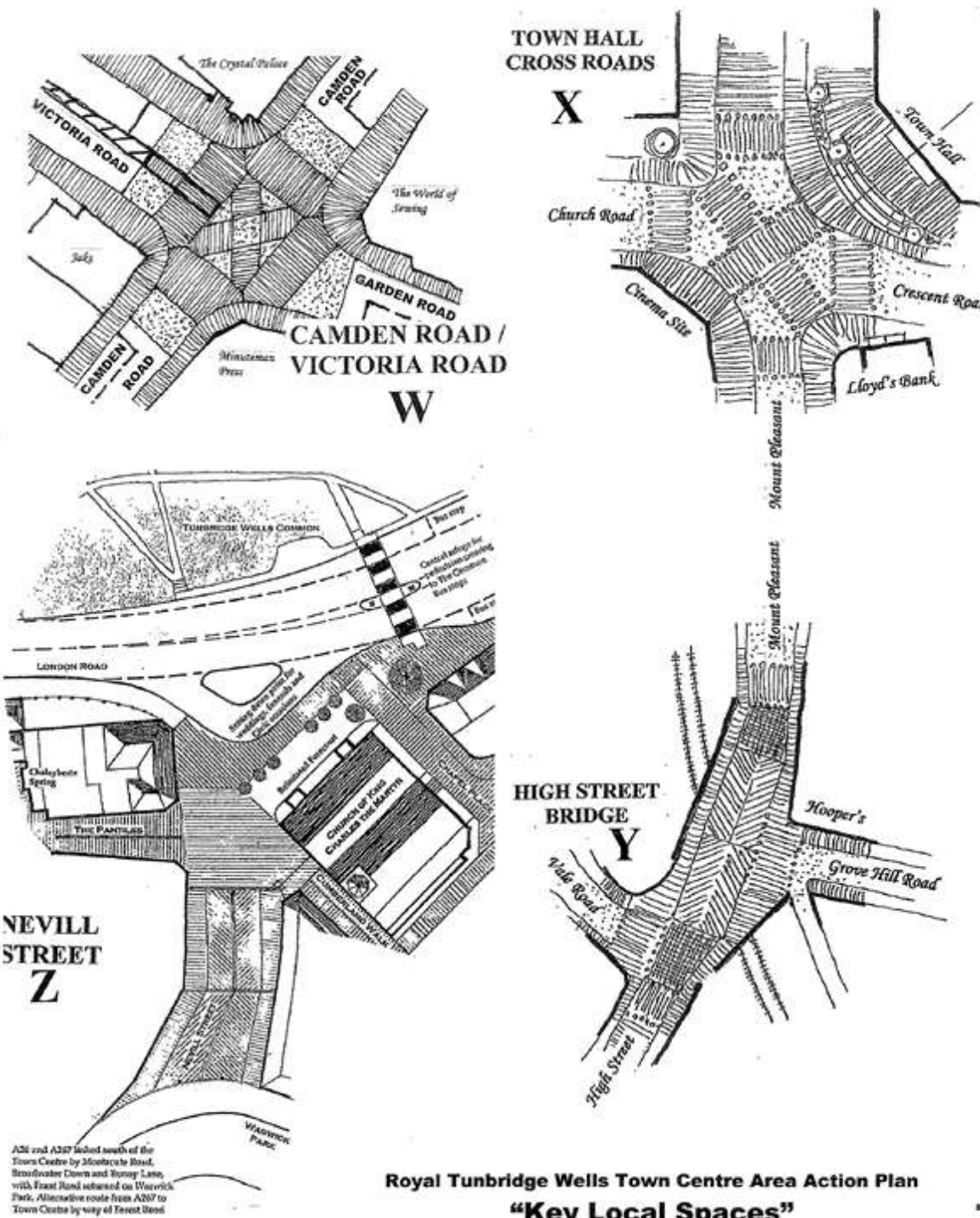
Three crucial intersections on the Central Spine have been identified on the Council’s own earlier TCAAP engagement. These are:

- **Town Hall Crossroads**, where the A264 crosses the Central Spine
- **High Street Bridge**, where access to the High Street from the Station is difficult
- **Nevill Street**, where the A267 cuts off The Pantiles from the rest of the town.

In the latter case, it is particularly unfortunate that visitors to The Pantiles are confronted by two sets of pedestrian barrier rails between Bath Square and the historic church of King Charles the Martyr.

Panel members considered that the crossroads junction of Camden Road with Victoria Road might similarly be identified as a “key local space” enhancing the flow of pedestrian traffic to the far end of Camden Road.

Plan 7, shows suggestions for the possible treatment of each together with an additional proposal for the Camden Road/Victoria Road crossing, drawing on the approach that has been adopted in London’s Oxford Circus.



Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Area Action Plan
"Key Local Spaces"



Individual members of the panel further advocated a proposal for the southernmost location on the Central Spine. This would involve an *experimental closing* of Nevill Street to see how traffic along the A267 would adjust to joining the A26 further south by way of Bunny Lane, or alternatively using Forest Road.

If successful, such an experiment could lead to returning Frant Road on Warwick Park and creating a new Piazza between The Pantiles and King Charles Church. The present crossing acts as a barrier both ways and it could be a great achievement to re-unite The Pantiles with the rest of the town in this way.

4.9 Public Realm

Paragraph 5.134 of the Core Strategy states that “Development should integrate positively with the public realm”, that is to say, those parts of the town that are available to be used by everyone, such as streets, parks and open spaces.

The Panel attaches much importance to the appearance of the street scene, including the need for surface materials and street furniture to be appropriate and signs kept to the minimum necessary. This is of enormous importance to the quality of the urban scene.

The Panel agrees that a successful and appropriate way to articulate the historic ‘spine’ of Tunbridge Wells from the Five Ways to the Pantiles would be to adhere to a carefully considered palette of street furniture and paving based on historic models.

Further, the distinct historic areas of the town centre and the connections between them, especially in the historic ‘Village’ area, the links via The Grove and Calverley Gardens to Calverley new town could all be acknowledged and expressed through consistent treatment of the Public Realm

The panel particularly suggests that the connection between The Pantiles at Nevill Street be subject to positive focus. Even if the more radical approach outlined in section 4.8 is considered too extreme, a simpler means could be to relocate the crossing point to the actual crossing points of the roads themselves. This could possibly be achieved by replacing the present roundabout junction with a traffic light controlled arrangement.

It is therefore considered important that a management plan should feature alongside the TCAAP to deal with matters such as street furniture, paving, bus routes, etc., that may be outside the remit of land use planning control.

4.9.1 Paving

Paving - and brick pavements in particular - form an essential element in the character of Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre. On Mount Pleasant the combination of trees and wide brick pavements are a major part of the street scene.

There should be a proper programme for protecting and maintaining this key feature – including dealing with the problem of tree roots and for ensuring that all contractors respect the requirement to make good pavements to the required standard after maintenance work



4.9.2 Street Furniture



Individual members of the panel expressed very strong views about the inappropriate selection of other street furniture – in particular for example the style of lamp standards installed in areas such as Mount Pleasant.

A managed programme of replacement should be put in place with the costs met by developer contributions (Community Infrastructure Levy)

The panel was divided on the subject of barrier railings. Some members strongly suggest that they should be removed wherever possible. Others expressed understandable concern about doing so in isolation without considering adequately the impact on safety, particularly for young children. This emphasises the requirement to make these decisions in conjunction with appropriate traffic calming or “shared space” initiatives. Where railings are retained they should be

in keeping with the surrounding area.

In preference, the possibility of an Oxford Circus type crossing discussed in section 4.8 should be seriously explored, subject to consultation amongst stakeholder groups.

The Camden Road/ Victoria Road/ Garden Road intersection re-developed using ideas along these lines would facilitate the removal of barrier rails and would serve to encourage the flow of pedestrians northwards down Camden Road.

Simple steps like reviewing the phasing of the lights could be investigated in the short term to be more pedestrian friendly in these zones.

4.9.3 Water Features

A “Water in the Wells” working group has recently been formed in the town, inspired by the German twin town of Wiesbaden, with the object of installing an array of water features in the town, to celebrate its spa town status.

The town does, in fact, have some good water features, such as the fountain in Dunorlan Park and the “Dripping Wells” in the Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, although these are not within the defined town centre. There may be some further scope to embrace water features within the town centre and it is a point to be borne in mind.

The Panel discussions were supportive of the ambitions and potential impact of such features within the Town Centre however the group is also mindful of the very significant cost of upkeep falling largely on the public purse.

The panel therefore suggests that developments proposing the creative use of water within the Town Centre should be welcomed but appraised based on medium term financial sustainability rather than short term visual impact alone.

4.9.4 Green Spaces

Calverley Grounds

Once part of the grounds of Calverley House (now the Hotel du Vin), Calverley Grounds presents an attractive landscape and serves both as a public park for the town centre, and as an amenity for the residential areas around. However, the grounds lack a coherent Management Plan.



Individuals on the panel suggest that the Management Plan needs to take account of the very beautiful landscape and topography; the views of nearby residents and the Friends of Calverley Grounds; and its town centre function, including its role as a venue for events such as the highly successful Christmas ice rink.

Trinity Garden

Also of importance in the Town Centre is Trinity Garden around Trinity Theatre and Art Centre. This also serves a Town Centre park function for the top end of the town, albeit on a smaller scale than Calverley Grounds. Again, it serves as a venue for events on occasion, in particular outdoor performances by the in-house Trinity Theatre Company.



It is important that this green space is maintained and well managed, and that car parking is not allowed to spill over from the adjacent hard standing on to the grass.

The Common



Some 250 acres of unspoilt woods, heathland and outcrops of rock make up the Common, which, again, features a very beautiful landscape, the topography providing breath taking views across the town.

However, the busy A26 London Road does tend to cut the Common off from the town centre, as crossings are not all well placed or easy to use. Maintenance of the

Common needs to be a priority for its owners and deterioration in its appearance is of concern to longer term residents. The Common needs to allow a healthier environment for plant life to flourish.

There are those on the panel who would welcome the purchase of the Common by the Borough Council for the future benefit of the residents of the town in perpetuity should it once again come to the market for sale.

The Panel suggests that thought be given to the positioning and operation of crossings, so that access can be improved from The Pantiles and elsewhere.

4.10 Culture & Leisure and Tourism

A key part of the Panel's vision for Royal Tunbridge Wells is that the town should be the cultural centre of the Kentish and Sussex Weald. That would enrich the lives of residents; give shoppers an added incentive to go to Tunbridge Wells in preference to some other centres; and provide a necessary focus for Tunbridge Wells as a tourist destination. A place to love to live in!

Individual panel members also considered that this was an essential component of embracing the needs of younger members of the community.

To achieve that vision, however, two principal features of the town centre need to be addressed. One is the Civic Complex at the cultural and civic heart of the town and the other is The Pantiles at its historic heart.

Civic Complex (including Town Hall)

The Civic Complex comprises an important and highly prominent group of statutorily listed buildings. All are still in use, although none fulfil their true potential and some have a backlog of maintenance that need to be addressed.



Aerial view of Civic Complex - Source: <http://www.townforum.org.uk/planning/rtwmasterplan-rtwtf260309.pdf> Slide 6

Financial constraints are, of course, likely to be a problem for public buildings, and lifts that were to have been installed in the Adult Education Centre and the Library have not progressed.

Panel members were divided on the subject of how this area should evolve as part of the TCAAP. At the two extremes, some would embrace the space as an opportunity to create a revitalised heart of the town with appropriate open spaces and features to act as a community and cultural hub from which the various shopping streets radiate.

Others framed the opportunities in a more evolutionary way, looking at opportunities likely to arise for example in the potential sale of the Police Station as an opportunity to re-house the museum facilities.

Short term what unites both extremes is the desire to see a revitalised approach to existing facilities which gives consideration to how these locations can be more accessible to members of the public and used for community meetings and activities and seen as a public resource.

Library and Adult Education Centre

The panel recognises the value of these facilities and the importance that they are improved as part of any significant regeneration to create a new cultural centre for the Town.

In the meantime, the panel considers that there could be much simpler and relatively inexpensive measures that could be investigated to link these facilities together, giving improved access to toilets and catering facilities.

Museum

It is the view of the Panel that Royal Tunbridge Wells ought to have a more functional and user-friendly museum and art gallery than there is at the moment.

It is recommended that there should be an aspiration to establish a “National Tunbridge Ware Museum” – perhaps at the bottom of the town near the Pantiles. This would capitalise on our unique collection, providing a museum that is beyond that of a typical provincial town.

Further, the unique Subbuteo collection could be developed into an exciting attraction which would potentially draw in younger people.

Police Station and Court House

It is understood that the building currently housing the Police Station and Court House will become surplus to requirements and thus available for an alternative use. This may not be easy to achieve, given the nature of the listed building, but the panel did briefly ponder the possibility of the Museum relocating into the Old Court House, thus allowing the library to expand into the Museum’s present accommodation and to improve its facilities.

Civic Way

Civic Way should provide a better civic space than the present arrangement.

This already provides a home for the popular Farmers’ Market however this could be encouraged to greater frequency if an enhanced environment could be created. Any new arrangement should seek a better linkage between the upper and lower levels of the Decimus Burton retaining wall.

Opinions on the panel were divided on the siting of the War Memorial, some thought that it is a good central location which worked reasonably well for the Remembrance Sunday Parade while others favoured a possible re-siting to give it greater prominence, easier access and to reflect the increasing interest and importance attached to community acts of remembrance.

The Assembly Hall

The Assembly Hall is overdue for a major overhaul. To fulfil its potential important role as part of an overall culture and tourism experience it should be stylish, modern, comfortable and well equipped. The back-stage facilities could be greatly improved by a side extension on the rear part of the Police Station site.

Trinity Theatre

The Theatre, Film, Music and Dance programmes, together with the youth work, are of course fundamental to the cultural life of Tunbridge Wells. The good work of this institution should continue to be enthusiastically supported and improvements made wherever circumstances permit. The pink area on Plan 4 represents the vitally important Cultural and Civic heart of the town.

The Pantiles

With regard to The Pantiles, it is essential for traders in this area of town that it is not only seen as a curiosity for visitors. The immediate challenges in this area centre around the largely vacant Union Square premises which until recently provided much needed “all year” custom from workers in the bars, coffee shops and other retail outlets.

The relatively recent opening of outlets like Jack Wills demonstrates the potential of this area to continue to add significantly to the overall retail experience and mix offered by the Town as a whole. This would be significantly strengthened in the Panel’s view should a scheme to connect The Pantiles with the Lower High Street prove to be feasible.

The “Day at the Wells” exhibition at the Corn Exchange was once a flagship attraction and the opportunity to creatively use the space as an alternative location for some of the Town’s museum collections was briefly discussed.

5. SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS BY PANEL SUB-GROUPS

5.1 Transport and Public Realm

- The Town should embrace being a pedestrian friendly environment with all companies and organisations encouraged to embrace “green transport” plans to limit both pollution and congestion
- Consideration should be given to providing attractive pedestrian links between the top and bottom end of the town, in particular addressing the challenges of the slope of Mount Pleasant with sustainable transport links. Ideally this would be done in a way which adds to the overall Tunbridge Wells unique “experience” (See retail and employment).
- There is general acknowledgement that the town needs to get better at attracting more visitors and businesses. Congestion is already bad at peak times and this will drive people and businesses away from the town. This fundamental dilemma needs to be the subject of separate detailed study
- Major development of the road infrastructure would ruin the town and one-way systems implemented elsewhere are now being dismantled (Ashford). These should not be the focus of investigations. We need to move with the times whilst retaining our unique characteristics
- Consideration should be given to limiting the number, weight, size and speed of lorries passing through the town to protect foundations and facades of historic buildings. This could be investigated in conjunction with restricting delivery times to major stores. A local By-Law is recommended
- New cultural and community facilities in the heart of the town should provide easy pedestrian and public transport access and where appropriate enhanced parking facilities
- Consideration should be given to staggering school hours to reduce congestion. Cycle Paths and Green Paths should be investigated as offering scope for an improved means of children getting to school
- Complete a de-cluttering survey throughout the town
- Select and adhere to an appropriate palette of street furniture
- Implement design guidance for clear traffic information and produce affordable action plan to implement de-cluttering recommendations
- The impact of congestion on raised pollution levels and consequential harm to the natural environment should be a consideration in developing improvements
- Maintain regular dialogue with KCC and strongly promote aspirations for traffic flow in the town
- Ensure all new plans include measures to restrict any impact on congestion and an impact assessment on wider transport infrastructure
- Consider use of “green” obstacles to reduce sight lines and lower vehicle speeds
- Fight to retain fast services to London via Rail
- Improve access to parking at stations
- Investigate Park and Ride facility together with rail “shuttles” between High Brooms and Tunbridge Wells stations
- Support any opportunities to restore rail links to the Southern/Sussex hinterland
- Adopt “Pay on Exit” as the standard at all Council Parking sites (see Retail)

5.2 Employment and Retail

- Avoid replicating what other towns offer by trying to create a major single new location with the sole designation of “retail”. Instead look for retail to be a component of a variety of development sites

- Embrace the linear nature of the town and the topography of the area and use it creatively to create a means of transport to connect the various areas retail districts - our own equivalent of the San Francisco “trams” (see Transport). Lower cost alternatives should be developed as a short term expedient
- Maintain the vibrancy of mini-ecosystems by integrating retail with housing and business within walking distance, creating a modern vibrant urban culture
- Encourage extended opening hours to create a vibrant evening cultural offer
- Encourage a diversity of retail offering – following the model of the Brighton “Lanes” or Canterbury, with each area able to promote its offer as “bigger than the sum of the parts”
- Recognise the opportunities that e-business offers to re-pitch the Tunbridge Wells offer to major employers as a place which offers proximity to London but much better quality of life and access to education for families
- Focus on the needs of high end business start-ups – professional services and entrepreneurs
- Establish and nurture a “critical mass” of such small and potentially fast growing businesses – building on initiatives like Meejahub
- Particularly focus on the retail offer in development sites that strategically strengthen the existing linear offering – for example Cinema site, station car park, Great Hall etc.
- Work creatively with Landlords to minimise the impact of empty units – nurturing smaller businesses and encouraging/facilitating short flexible lets through creative rating policies
- Consider a comprehensive “management plan” to address those areas that are outside of the scope of the planning system alone
- Work collaboratively with North Farm rather than trying to compete against their offer – the town overall must work for residents, workers and visitors
- Address traffic congestion (See Transport and Public Realm)
- Adopt Pay on Exit to encourage shoppers and visitors to spend longer in the town (see Transport and Public Realm)
- Study the recommendations of Mary Portas to refresh and re-focus the town’s retail positioning
- Monitor empty units and maintain a register of all retailers who are dissatisfied with their current locations/provision. Act as a central point of contact for retailers and developers to be “matched” to new opportunities

5.3 Culture & Leisure and Tourism

- Position the town as the cultural heart of West Kent and East Sussex (the west Kent equivalent to Canterbury in the East)
- Embrace the vision of a place where people of all ages and backgrounds can come to enjoy, watch, listen and join in with arts, music, theatre and drama events of the highest quality and the widest range
- Specify a library fit for the 21st century, accessible, interesting and fun
- Invest in museums that are interactive, educational and beautiful, showcasing the best of our local heritage and unique collections. An altogether better Museum and Art Gallery is needed, not least if Royal Tunbridge Wells is to be taken seriously as a tourist destination, as well as a culture centre for the area
- Rejuvenate the Assembly Hall to attract the brightest and best international, national and local stars. It should be stylish, modern, comfortable and well equipped.
- Our sports centres should provide space where we can embrace exercise as part of a healthier lifestyle choice. They should be of sufficient standard to attract competitive events of national standing.
- Manage our parks to enhance their own natural character and encourage wildlife and sustainability as well as outdoor sports and cultural events

- Our streets, through their lamp posts, benches, paving and art work should show a respect for the past but an energy for the future. Our streets should be a place to stop and chat, enjoy a bite to eat, a drop to drink and take in a stunning view
- The cultural and civic heart of the town needs to be strengthened by improvements to the Adult Education Centre, the Library, the Museum, the Town Hall site and Calverley Terrace. In particular, much better use needs to be made of the Town Hall for cultural and community purposes, the Library and the Adult Education Centre should be better integrated and better use needs to be made of the Police Station building
- The work of Trinity and the Assembly Hall should continue to be supported and improvements made, when circumstances permit
- The area around the Civic Complex should be investigated as opportunities for short term improvement, including the area of huts behind the AEC and the potential of Civic and Monson Ways realised
- The historic centre of the town, The Pantiles, also needs to be addressed. In particular, the Corn Exchange is an attractive building that is currently not fulfilling its potential and a new use needs to be found for the vacant 'Day at the Wells' accommodation. It may be that some of the Museum's costume collection, now in store, could be displayed there
- In the longer term, the Bath House might be better presented and a hotel considered on the Union House site
- Position the town as a tourist hub from which to explore West Kent and East Sussex, particularly for specific special interest groups – for example – weekend breaks from London, walkers, cyclists and families wishing to combine culture with coast. Tourism is a potentially significant income driver and the town's proximity to the Channel Tunnel, Gatwick, Heathrow and the M25 are all very important strategic assets that are under sold

5.4 Housing and Natural & Built Environment

- Housing should be recognised as an important element of the town centre and should be strengthened by suitable growth in those places that have been identified
- Maintain and strengthen the uniqueness of Tunbridge Wells in providing houses for families, with gardens, throughout the Town Centre.
- Ensure that development schemes do not over-provide for flats and apartments, creating ghettos for younger commuters with no real connection or contribution to the wider community.
- Address the mismatch between housing provision and requirement across the Borough and make efforts to better align provision with need, within the overall total provision envisaged in the Core Strategy
- Develop a strategic Management Plan for Calverley Grounds, taking into account its high landscape value; its recreational function; its role as an occasional town centre events venue; and, importantly, the views of nearby residents and the "Friends of Calverley Grounds"
- Recognise the essential importance of quality in any new development which, personal tastes in style apart, should respect its context and take account of the important key views that exist in the town
- Ensure that residents are able to make full use of local services without reliance upon car transport
- Embrace the potential to adapt heritage buildings to fulfil modern functions

6. FUTURE PANEL ACTIVITIES

This report has had to be produced within a very limited time frame and aspects of it should be the subject of further work on an evolving and continuous basis. This is particularly relevant in relation to developing consensus around the appropriate use of shared space within the Town Centre and in consulting on which precise views and vistas should be considered in planning terms.

Individual panel members are active across a number of relevant working groups and forums that have an interest in the town and its future development. It is envisaged that those groups interested in discussing the panel's report will be able to do so as a result of this overlap and that feedback from these discussions can be brought back to the panel through the same channels.

Groups who do not have members that are on the panel but are interested in discussing the report at a future meeting are invited to contact Bob Atwood, panel chairman in the first instance.

Feedback from any discussions of this nature would be helpful to the panel in understanding to what extent their recommendations represent a consensus view of a majority or whether there are issues that remain contentious or that have not been properly embraced and require further consideration. However it must be borne in mind that the panel's Report represents its member's consensus views at this point in time and will feed directly into the Council's consultation process. Future discussions with the panel, although welcome, cannot and will not in any way replace any individual's or organisation's right to make representations on the Council's Town Plan proposals directly to the Council

The Terms of Reference provide that, if the panel is a success and enthusiasm for its continued existence is maintained, then it could continue.

Existing panel members are certainly prepared to continue to serve, however there is agreement that in order to continue to be effective two main points need to be satisfied:

- First that the existence of the panel is welcomed and embraced as a useful resource for Officers and Elected Members of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. This is important in the sense that the panel is only likely to be approached pro-actively by TWBC on an ongoing basis if officers and elected members can see clear evidence that doing so enhances the quality of decision making or reduces the timescale within which effective consultation can be achieved.
- Second that the panel works in a complementary manner alongside pre-existing forums and working groups. It is acknowledged that all these groups fulfil valuable roles and represent individual communities of interest. There is no desire to cut across these or to eclipse them.

Considering the latter point, it is acknowledged that membership of the panel could usefully be reviewed to ensure that all interest groups are formally represented on the panel should they wish to be. This could make the panel more comprehensive and would certainly enhance communication and consultation between the panel and individual groups.

APPENDIX A

Tunbridge Wells Town Plan Panel

Terms of Reference

Purpose

To act as an "independent" consultative and advisory committee whose objective is to influence the physical construct of Royal Tunbridge Wells on an evolving and continuous basis. This will include the purpose, use, appearance, and disposition of buildings, public spaces, roads and infrastructure, and will take account of practicalities, aspirations and hopes of those living in, working in, and visiting the town.

The geographical area of interest is principally that described from time to time as the "town centre" of Royal Tunbridge Wells, but is not necessarily limited to that area.

Interface

The Panel will primarily interface with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in its role as the Local Planning Authority (LPA), but may also interface with Kent County Council and any other public or quasi-public body as it sees fit, but will remain "independent" from all these bodies. The Leader for the time being of TWBC will act as the link between the Panel and TWBC and will ensure that the latter provides the Panel with all public domain information and data that it requires.

Consultees

The Panel may consult whomsoever they wish, although these are likely to fall into three categories;

- ad hoc members of the public with a particular interest in Tunbridge Wells
- groups and individuals who have expressed an interest or who might be interested in becoming involved as a regular "sounding board" for the Panel
- experts who might offer advice or other input on a "pro - bono" basis or on a paid basis (if funded)

Constitution

The Panel will comprise a minimum of (8) members, either individuals in their own capacity or individuals representing Groups. It is expected that if numbers fall below the minimum, the Panel will no longer be viable and should be disbanded.

The panel will comprise of a maximum of 15 members.

Panel Members should not have any personal interest in any organisation or company that they might stand to benefit directly from any development contracts other than indirectly by ensuring the general vibrancy and health of the Town. If a person does become connected for any reason then they should be required at least to declare their interest and stand aside from voting on any corporate view expressed by the Panel or they will be required to stand down from the Panel.

Panel members will not be remunerated. No expenses incurred by Panel members will be refundable unless or until funding for that purpose is obtained.

The Panel will vote on its proposed actions, whether these be to present preferred options to TWBC or on any other proposed course of action. Decision will be by simple majority. A quorum will be 50% of members. In the event of deadlock, the chair of the meeting will have a second vote.

Members unable to be present at a meeting may provide their vote by proxy.

Full meetings should be held monthly. Ad hoc and informal meetings may be called at will, but no voting may take place at such meetings.

Initial operating "mode"

The Panel will need to act quickly to input into the formal planning process required by statute from TWBC, in particular the "Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Area Action Plan" (TCAAP). This document is planned to be finalised by the Spring of 2012 and will set the scene for formal town centre planning for the next years unless or until a formal review and amendment process is commenced.

The Panel may need to take a root and branch approach to this exercise, arriving at conclusions as to the likely aspirations for the Town before moving to more detailed matters. Such aspirations will include the balance between retail, business, residential, culture, and entertainment etc. as well as taking into account history and design.

"Project" mode

Regardless of the above timeframe, the Panel may wish to undertake particular studies and make particular recommendations to TWBC from time to time. Examples are:

- Traffic movement studies
- Future of Civic Centre
- Street appearance and furniture etc.

Long term mode

If the Panel is a success and enthusiasm for its existence is maintained, then the Panel should continue to review and update its views on aspirations, plans and opportunities and feed these into a public consultation process as well as making them known to the LPA (TWBC).

Funding

There is no proposed source of funding at present, although the Panel is at liberty to raise funds from the public or from businesses should it deem it appropriate. It is thought that there should be no funding direct by TWBC as to do so would prejudice the Panel's independence. It is possible that the Panel may put forward a convincing case from time to time for public monies to be used for the purposes of a particular study. In such cases TWBC will have to decide whether to fund such studies would be in the public interest, before making any decision to do so.

Outputs

The Panel will put forward its suggestions for the RTW TCAAP ranking equally with other consultees in this statutory process. It will also have the right to publish its recommendations directly to the public domain.

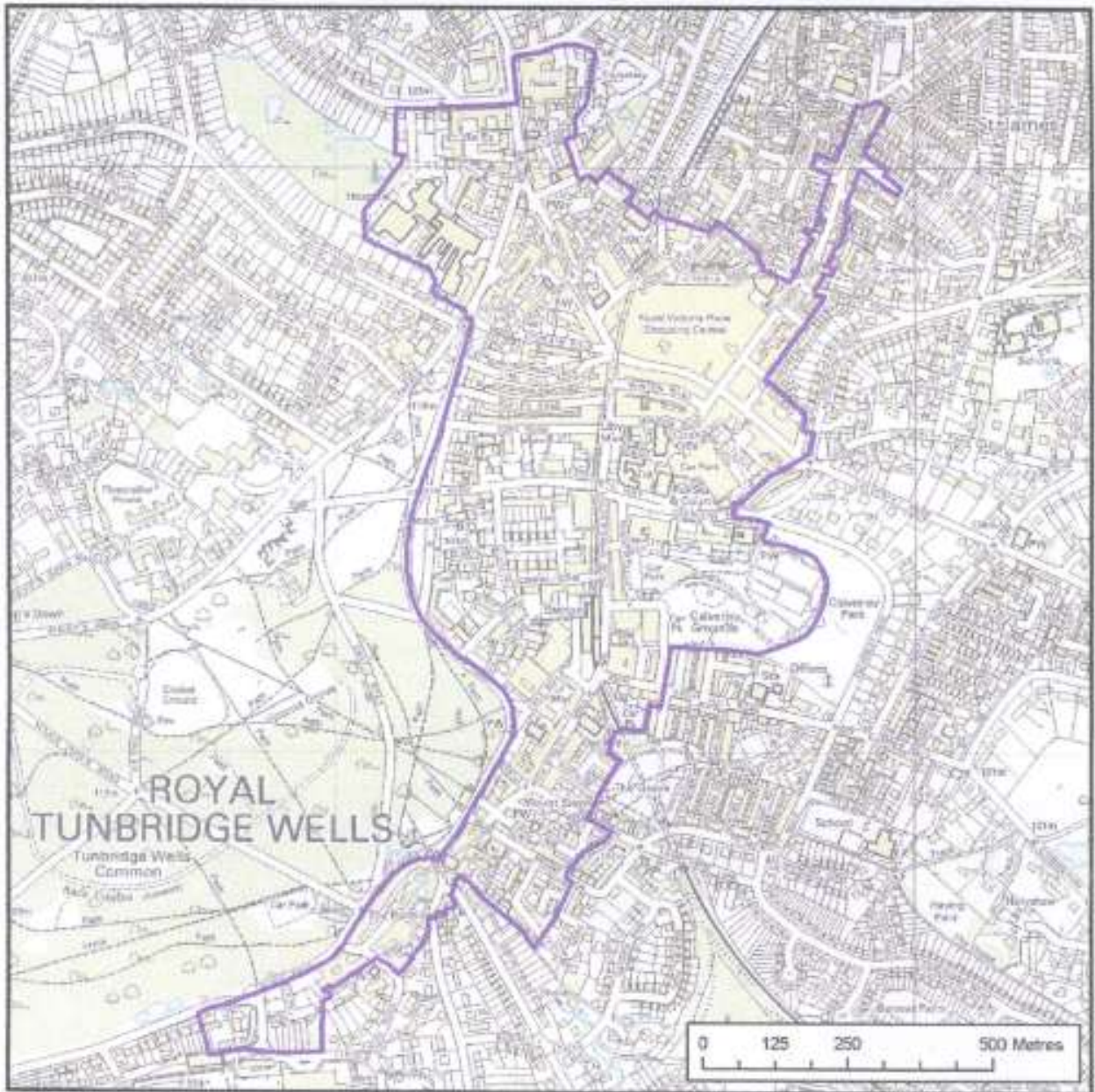
The Panel may publish its recommendations on project work and long term work as it sees fit and may consult with TWBC or any other body during its consideration of such work.

The Panel may consider the viability and/or practicality of its proposals, and in any case should state to what extent those aspects have been considered. The Panel is not constrained in this respect, but if such matters have not been taken into account, it should clearly state that fact when publishing its proposals or ideas.

APPENDIX B**TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN PLAN PANEL****Initial Members**

James Partridge	TW Business Forum (Chairman from 4 th April 2012 – 30 May 2012)
Cllr Bob Atwood	Former Leader TWBC (Chairman to 7 th March & from 1 June 2012)
David Clarke	Operations Director – AXA PPP
Ptolemy Dean	Architect and former resident
Maggie Fraser	Chairman, Tunbridge Wells Over Fifties Forum. Town Forum
John Forster	Chairman, Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society
Richard Karn	Managing Director – Courier Media Group
Katharina Mahler-Bech	Local Strategic Partnership and Town Forum
Stuart Page	Architect
Alison Parmar	Working Mother and Marketing Manager
Richard Powell	Vice Principal – The Skinners' Kent Academy
Peter Randall	Kent Association of Local Councils (past Chair)
Richard Simm	Chairman of the Pantiles Traders
Philip Whitbourn	Retired architect and planner
Chris Cassidy	Social Media expert

The Panel was established under Terms of Reference agreed on 7th December 2011, and is an independent, consultative and advisory committee whose objective is to influence the physical construct of Royal Tunbridge Wells, including the purpose, use, appearance and disposition of buildings, public spaces, roads and infrastructure, taking account of the aspirations and hopes of those living in, working in and visiting the town. Detailed work for the Panel has been taken forward by four specialist study groups concerned with: Transport and Public Realm; Employment and Retail; Culture and Leisure and Housing and the Natural and Built Environment.

APPENDIX C**TOWN CENTRE BOUNDARY**

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APPENDIX D

Opportunities for Change and the National Planning Policy Framework

The recent publication of the Coalition's National Planning Policy Framework with its "presumption in favour of sustainable development" created both an opportunity and a risk.

The most significant risk appears to be that where town centre strategy plans are "absent" or "silent" or where "relevant policies are out of date", the expectation is that permission for development should be granted.

Whilst outside of the scope of the panel as defined by the terms of reference, in the course of our discussions Individuals on the panel have considered the following twelve main site specific opportunities that appear to merit consideration for desirable change which are indicated by hatching on Plan 1, together with nine further areas.

These have not been debated in detail by the panel and are included as an Appendix to the report as a result.

Former Kent and Sussex Hospital



The large site of the former Hospital is suitable for early redevelopment, possibly for educational and/or housing purposes. There has been some speculation about the possible need for a new school in this area and about the possible establishment of a University facility in Tunbridge Wells. If, on investigation, either of these educational uses is found to be required in the area, then this is a site that should be seriously considered for them, possibly with

housing development in addition. Otherwise, the likely use for the site is as housing. At a density of 50 dwellings per hectare, upwards of 200 dwellings could be provided, or at a density of 70, nearer to 300 dwellings.

Bus Garage

This site in St John's Road currently serves a valuable function as the Arriva Bus Depot. However, in the medium term, there may be a possibility of the Depot relocating to a less congested area elsewhere, in which case the site might be suitable for a mixed use development, possibly with business uses on the St John's Road frontage and residential development off Woodbury Park



Road to the rear.

Jarvis' Yard



Former builders yard in a predominantly residential area, now partly occupied by artists and creative industries, which should be encouraged to remain and to be integrated with new residential development that is sympathetic to the area.

Royal Victoria Place

Royal Victoria Place is Tunbridge Wells' enclosed shopping mall, where many of the national multiples such as WH Smith, HMV and Gap are to be found.

The complex is situated towards the northern end of Tunbridge Wells' shopping centre and any major expansion of retail floorspace in this position is not favoured. Rather, limited new shopping development on the former cinema site, and to the south of it, is seen as more appropriate in balancing the northern and southern ends of Tunbridge Wells' linear shopping centre.

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that aspects of the twenty year old complex, which was opened by Diana, Princess of Wales in 1992, are not now wholly satisfactory.

In particular, the Market Square, which was originally intended to accommodate a vibrant stall market, and Ely Court, originally an attractive open courtyard surrounded by specialist food shops, now both look rather forlorn areas. Moreover, several shops in the main mall are small by today's standards and outlets such as H&M fall short of customers' expectations in a regional shopping centre such as Tunbridge Wells.

It may be therefore that modest developments could be undertaken in these areas, provided that the older Conservation Area frontage buildings to Calverley and Camden Roads continue to be respected. Thus, for example, there might be opportunities to, say, upgrade M&S, or to provide a Ladies department for H&M.

Meadow Road

Between Meadow Road multi storey car park and Coronation Parade is an unattractive area behind the Post Office. A comprehensive study of this whole block and the roads around it could lead to a

welcome improvement. The site might well offer scope for better retail facilities and an increased residential element together, perhaps, with a more user-friendly Post Office.

Lifestyle Ford

With a frontage to the Mount Ephraim traffic bottleneck and ramifications extending back into Culverden Street and Rock Villa Road.. Most other car dealerships in Tunbridge Wells are now located at North Farm and were Lifestyle Ford to follow suit, the area could be attractively redeveloped for residential purposes.

Crescent Road

This area in front and at the side of the Crescent Road multi-storey car park was formerly known as Harveytown. It is close to Calverley Park and the Crescent and, also to the attractive residential enclave at Cadogan Gardens. A skilful development in this area could enhance the setting of the surrounding features of character and provide centrally located residential or business premises.

Cinema Site

The former Ritz Cinema site is widely acknowledged as being in need of the most urgent attention.

Broken windows and general dereliction of this sort should be unacceptable in this prominent position in the Conservation Area. Powers exist, under Section 215 of the Planning Act for a notice to be served, where a property is adversely affecting the amenity of an area and, at the very least, broken windows should be mended and the property generally tidied up, if it is to remain for even a relatively short length of time.



Planning permission exists for a colonnade along the Mount Pleasant frontage, providing a vital shopping link between the top and bottom ends of the town, with a hotel above. This could be an acceptable form of development, although further consideration of the corner treatment would be welcome and, in the event, the new owners may have other and better ideas.

However, if full scale redevelopment of the site is to be delayed for any further significant length of time serious consideration needs to be given to a short term treatment of the site.

The shop units along Mount Pleasant are not physically attached to the cinema structure but are separated by an open passage. Thus, if the cinema were to be demolished a temporary car park could be created on its site, screened from the road by the present shops let on short leases.

This would also allow a hoarding that currently serves no useful purpose to be removed and the public footpath reinstated to its full width.

Alternatively a modern semi-translucent “wrap” of the building might open up the opportunity to promote the shopping amenities at the bottom of Mount Pleasant and on the High Street to perhaps support the investment being made by Hoopers.

In the longer term redevelopment could be welcome all the way down to Lonsdale Gardens, including Mount Pleasant House, which has suffered period of vacancy in spite of its excellent location close to the Station and Calverley Grounds.

Some members of the panel commended a leisure theme should be retained on this site – providing facilities which would prove attractive for younger people – for example a permanent Ice Rink facility.

Vale Avenue



Around Vale Avenue a random collection of office buildings has emerged from the 1970s onwards. The group includes Merevale House, facing The Common and Vale House. Redevelopment appears more likely to be in the medium or long, rather than the short term and the opportunity for local employment is important.

However, the site is well located for business

purposes and suitably phased and designed development could both improve the appearance of the area and the quality of the accommodation.

Station Car Park East

Situated beside the railway line and approached from Grove Hill Road alongside Brittens music shop, this surface car park currently provides private parking.

The car park is set in a hollow and redevelopment on several levels would be physically possible. The Brittens frontage faces Hoopers Department Store, which is currently undergoing a major refurbishment. Also, it is close to the new Morrisons Supermarket, the High Street, the Station and Mount Pleasant. The site currently has a Primary Shopping Area notation on the present approved Development Plan and it would appear to have potential for a significant retail development, were such a proposal to be forthcoming. Alternatively a mixed use development of town centre uses could be appropriate.



Union House



Although clearly preferable to the five, eight and eleven storied buildings proposed for this site in the 1960s, this 1970s brutal block has never really been right for the famous Pantiles. Moreover, in the opinion of Advisory Panel experts, it provides relatively poor office accommodation by present day standards. The possibility of a youth hub in Union Square was discussed, as was the idea of a new hotel.

As the ground slopes at the rear, it should be possible to arrange for car parking to be on more than one level, without too much difficulty.

Plant and Tools Site

This 0.39 hectare site would have been suitable for a park and ride facility, being well located on the edge of town; adjacent to the Town Centre Bus Link; and on the A26.

However, failing that, a scheme has recently come forward for the provision of 66 dwellings on the site, 20 of them “affordable”.

Further opportunities

In addition to the foregoing dozen sites further smaller opportunities may also arise, bringing the total to twenty one.

Mt Pleasant Avenue

This sloping surface car park may offer scope for access at different levels. Also, it adjoins AXA. PPP offices in Crescent Road and may offer an opportunity for business use, although residential use could be a possibility too. As with all schemes on car park land, regard needs to be had to maintaining the necessary level of car parking across the town

In any proposal for this site, the possibility of opening up a further link between Mount Pleasant and Calverley Grounds ought to be explored.

Vale Road

An area of land between the back of properties on the west side of the High Street and the east side of Vale Road adjoins AXA. PPP's Vale Road offices and may have scope for business development, possibly including some properties in Vale Road itself. In this event, it might be possible to ease the awkward corner of Vale Road, where buses in particular at times have difficulty in passing.

21-25 Mount Pleasant

A small site, but one that is strategically placed between the station and the cinema site. There may be potential for a limited development for retail and business purposes, perhaps with an upper floor extending back across the railway tunnel, subject to any engineering considerations.

Station Car Park West

Currently a private car park, although there is a case for a better setting down and picking up facility at Tunbridge Wells Station. When Morrisons supermarket previously traded from their premises in the Station Approach, a publicly accessible footbridge linked the store with Mount Pleasant.

Since then, the footbridge has been made internal to the station and access by foot to the new store is thus more difficult than used to be the case. It may, therefore, be worth exploring the possibility of a parallel footbridge from Mount Pleasant, open to the public and linking over the Station Approach into the Morrisons supermarket and the multi storey car park. Coupled with this might be a development, perhaps in the form of a conservatory on stilts above the Station Car Park West, with access from the new footbridge.

Great Hall

Great Hall is a key building in the town centre and its car park, at the rear, is currently of importance to the area around. Also the presence of the BBC South East Region is clearly of importance too. However, the arcade has never worked in a particularly satisfactory way. Furthermore, there is some under used space behind nos. 14-18 Mount Pleasant and there may be scope for a rearrangement of the arcade and Hoopers Men's Department to provide a good sized retail unit on this site. (Plan 8 refers)

Beech Street and Camden Road Car Parks

Currently surface car parks, these two small areas may offer scope for the introduction of a limited amount of new residential accommodation, particularly if use can be made of the changes in level to avoid the loss of car parking in the area.

Little Mount Sion and Warwick Road Car Park

Again, two small surface car parks that may offer limited scope for residential development, provided that necessary car parking can be maintained. Although important to the area, which is short of parking space, the surface car parks are not visually attractive in the Conservation Area and the opportunity may exist for some visual improvement.