



October 2008

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Dear Colleague,

Here is the second edition of Partner News that aims to give you a brief overview of the activity here at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. We've added contact information if there is an area that you need more details about.

You are hopefully aware that we are soon to be reinspected by the Audit Commission for CPA. This is the Government body that gave us a weak rating back in 2004 and we have invited them back to reassess us because we feel that we no longer deserve it. Much of this confidence comes from the work that we have been doing with you as partners and the achievements we have made jointly.

I hope you enjoy this edition and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Diane Talbot
Communications Manager
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Section 1 - Delivering high quality services to our customers

Director of Planning and Development Rob Cottrill discusses the proposed development with local resident David Wakefield at the exhibition.

Council commended on handling of former Cinema site development

We have now received the planning application for Former Cinema Site in the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells. The plans were displayed in the former Jones shoe shop at the start of September with a model of the new building that includes a hotel, offices and shops.



In an article printed in the Tunbridge Wells Courier newspaper on 12 September the owner's representative, David Swann said: 'It is thanks to everyone's efforts, especially the Leader and Officers of the Council, that I believe we have managed to produce a scheme of architectural merit befitting such an important site.' He went on to say 'the spirit and co-operation over the plans with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has been fantastic' and praised the Leader Cllr Roy Bullock, Chief Executive Sheila Wheeler and Director of Planning and Development Rob Cottrill and his team.

The planning applications for the demolition of the former cinema building and for the new development can be viewed on public access by using the following reference numbers: 08/03126 and 08/03119. To open public access just click on the below link:

<http://pa.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/publicaccess/default.aspx>

Director of Planning and Development Rob Cottrill discusses the proposed development with local resident David Wakefield at the exhibition last week

Left to right: Cllr Catherine Mayhew, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Access with private landlord Sarah Bardsley and Nick Hymas

Private Accredited Letting Scheme

The Council launched the Private Accredited Letting (PAL) Scheme in August 2008 so that good private sector landlords can be recognised as providers of decent, well-managed accommodation. As the scheme is property based, landlords can apply for as many (or few) of their properties to be accredited as they wish.

Joining this voluntary scheme is free and is available to landlords who own accommodation for private renting within the Tunbridge Wells Borough boundary. Accreditation is valid for three years.

Benefits of joining the scheme include:

- Free advertising of accredited properties on the PAL website.
- Access to financial assistance of up to £3,000 per property for certain Improvements.
- Support and advice from a dedicated accreditation officer.
- Stickers branded with the PAL logo to display in properties.



The first landlords to receive Private Accredited Letting Scheme status were Nick Hymas and Sarah Bardsley, who were presented with their certificate by Cllr Catherine Mayhew, Portfolio Holder for Housing, on Thursday 28 August at their property in Southborough.

Nick Hymas and Sarah Bardsley decided to apply for accreditation on their properties to give themselves a market advantage over other non-accredited properties.

There are now currently seven properties in the PAL Scheme, owned by five different landlords. Five of the properties are Houses in Multiple Occupation, meaning there are a total of 36 units of accommodation in the scheme.

Landlords who would like more information on joining the scheme should contact the accreditation officer Thomas Best-Shaw on 01892 554409.

To view the PAL website log onto www.palscheme.co.uk.

Section 2 - Improving customer service satisfaction

Borough wide survey and boost surveys

Earlier this year, BMG Research was commissioned to complete the eighth residents survey for the Council. This involved completing face to face interviews with 1,000 households across the borough to find out what people think of their local area and the services provided. BMG Research was also commissioned to carry out a boost survey with three hard to reach groups: older people, residents of Black and Minority Ethnic origin and Migrant workers from the A2 and A8 countries (2004 and 2007 accession states). About 200 interviews were completed with each of these hard to reach groups and the headline results have just been received from each of these surveys.

Residents were asked questions on their local area, satisfaction with local services, accessibility to services, their home, their health and well being, community safety, community involvement and communication with the Council.

In the main survey, an exceptional 92% of respondents were 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with their local area as a place to live. A greater proportion of Older People were satisfied with their local area (94.0%) compared with those of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) origin (87.4%) and Migrant workers (82.1%).

There were slight differences in what respondents thought needed improving between the rural and urban areas. Rural areas identified traffic congestion, public transport and lack of facilities for young people as areas for improvement, whereas urban areas tended to highlight parking, traffic congestion and poor quality roads/highways. Community safety & policing, education and health & well-being were also considered to be the top three community priorities for the area.

92% of respondents felt that their local area was a place where different people could get on well together. All three hard to reach groups also recorded high levels of agreement with this statement.

92% of respondents felt safe when outside in their neighbourhood compared with only 64% of respondents who felt safe when outside in Royal Tunbridge Wells. These results were also mirrored within the Older People survey whereas over 85% of Migrant workers felt safe in both their local area and in Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre.

Overall, the findings from the surveys demonstrate that residents are very satisfied with their local area as a place to live. Satisfaction with service provision is also high and by working in partnership, further progress can be made to improve service delivery.

Copies of the reports will be circulated to partners in October. Alternatively, for further information, please contact the Research and Information Officer, Holly Goring, on 01892 526121 ext. 2602.

A new online access guide for the Borough



The Council, working with the Borough's Access Group, has teamed up with DisabledGo, a National Accessibility Project, to develop a new online guide, which will set out how accessible many public and private venues in the Borough are to people with a range of impairments and conditions.

The guide will provide detailed information for 1,000 venues across the Borough including hotels, tourist attractions, pubs, local libraries, train stations, leisure and entertainment facilities and council offices. The guide will empower residents to judge the disabled access to venues for themselves.

A consultation event is being held on Tuesday 18 November, 12-2pm in the Council Chamber. At the event people can find out about what the new online guide will offer and will be invited to share what venues they think should be included in the guide.

Every venue included in the guide will be visited by a trained researcher and the information will be constructed into an online guide, due to go live in Spring 2009.

For further information, contact Sarah Andrews, Equality Policy Officer at TWBC, at sarah.andrews@tunbridgewells.gov.uk or Rachel Felton, Partnership Manager for DisabledGo, at rachel.felton@disabledgo.info, or call 01438 842710.

Tunbridge Wells Gateway



The new Tunbridge Wells Gateway is really taking shape and, if everything goes according to plan, the doors will be open to the public on Monday 3 November. The scaffolding is coming down and the inside is beginning to be fitted out.

The mini-Gateway has been up and running in the Town Hall since 3 September and the Gateway Customer Service Assistants (CSAs) are currently dealing with housing benefit, council tax and parking enquiries using the new IT system.

All staff are now trained on switchboard duties, and due to the large amount of knowledge each area requires, they are now starting to specialise in certain areas. Once competent in their area they will then continue with training in other areas.

Information, recreation and the bringing together of generations on International Day of Older Persons

To mark International Day of Older Persons on Wednesday 1 October, the Council and some of its partners held a variety of events and activities to celebrate enjoying a full and active life and to bring generations together.

Cllr June Crowhurst, Member Champion for Equality and Diversity, joined Council Officers from the Housing and Health Service, Kent Fire and Rescue, Age Concern, 'in touch' Home Improvement Agency, Town and Country Housing Group and Kent County Council's Social Services, to offer information and advice to older people at an information stand in Royal Victoria Place shopping centre in Tunbridge Wells.

The Mayor of Tunbridge Wells, Cllr Mike Rusbridge, joined local primary schools, local youth clubs, community workers and older people from across the town to play a short mat

indoor bowls tournament. The tournament took place at the TN2 Community Centre in Tunbridge Wells, and on display were images of Victorian bowls equipment from Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery, and West Kent Arts Partnership organised the creation of a collage of images involving all the generations that attended the event.

The first 60 people aged 60 or over who booked tickets for Buddy Holly and the Cricketers saw the performance for free at the Assembly Hall Theatre on International Day of Older Persons. The music had people dancing in the aisles and singing along to their favourite tunes.

People aged 50 and above also had the chance to get active with special 50+ sports sessions at Putlands Sports and Leisure Centre in Paddock Wood and the Weald Sports Centre in Cranbrook. Tunbridge Wells Sports Centre held 50+ sports sessions on Tuesday 30 September and Friday 3 October, also as part of the celebrations for International Day of Older Persons.

Below Left: Cllr June Crowhurst, Member Champion for Equality and Diversity, joins Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Officers (from left to right) Stephanie Bollen-Hickman, Housing Policy and Research Manager, Helen Wolstenholme, Stronger Healthier Communities Coordinator, and Hazel Pearson, Housing Team Assistant at the information stand in Royal Victoria Place.

Below Right: Older people seek out information and advice at the information stand in Royal Victoria Place.



Below: The Mayor, Cllr Mike Rusbridge, joins local primary schools, local youth clubs, community workers and older people from across the town in playing a short mat indoor bowls tournament at the TN2 Community Centre.



Section 3 - Ensuring that we are well-managed, proactive and deliver value-for-money services

Tunbridge Wells Together - Driving the Borough forward in partnership



The Council in partnership with the public, private, community and voluntary sectors has established our local LSP called Tunbridge Wells Together. The new partnership key responsibilities are:

To be the 'partnership of partnerships' and to act together to improve and enhance opportunities for all communities in the borough of Tunbridge Wells

To ensure delivery of the Vision as set out in the Sustainable Community Plan (SCP)

To ensure delivery of the Local Action Plan underpinning the Sustainable Community Plan and the Kent Agreement Two

To provide leadership in achieving the Vision and communicating it widely and simply to all our residents and wider stakeholders

To set longer term priorities taking account of external factor and priorities identified by the constituent member of partnership

To influence the deployment of mainstream resources

Promote and foster synergy and coherence between the partnership and wider partnerships

To have oversight of and aim to co-ordinate community consultation engagement and consultation across partners and where appropriate combine them

Encourage innovative thinking to tackle cross cutting issues between economic, social and environmental objectives

To work towards the following strategic areas as set out in the Sustainable Community Plan

- Safeguarding our environment
- Maintaining a thriving economy
- Enabling people to take part in and enjoy leisure activities
- Increasing community safety and reducing the fear of crime
- Transport - getting around the borough
- Meeting the need for housing
- Promoting health and improving well-being
- Encouraging social inclusion by supporting independence
- Learning for all

The LSP is currently working on developing a long-term vision and three workshops will be held over the coming two months, to allow the partnership to develop a shared understanding of the long-term challenges and opportunities for the Borough.

For more information on the LSP please see the website, which includes detailed information on key structures and key contacts:

www.tunbridgewellstogether.co.uk

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) update

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's CPA inspection is approaching fast. We have submitted our Self-assessment to the Audit Commission along with a vast array of supporting documents and a booklet of 'I Made a Difference!' case studies that documents the impact this organisation and its partners have had on the people of Tunbridge Wells borough.

You can see both the Self-assessment, which has received positive feedback from the Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA), and the case studies on our website at <http://www2.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=1488>.

The next steps include a tour of the borough, where we will get the chance to show the inspectors first hand the differences TWBC and its partners make to the lives of real people on the ground, and the onsite inspection week. Please note the following dates:

Initial feedback of findings from CPA pre-onsite work - **Monday 20 October**

Tour of Borough - **Monday 20 October**

CPA Week - **Week commencing Monday 10 November**

Draft Report from CPA Team - **Friday 16 January**

Final CPA Re-categorisation report given to Council - **Friday 13 February**

Feedback meeting with Council - commence improvement planning - **Friday 13 February**

Final report publication - Tuesday 17 March

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our partners who have helped us make this Borough the great place it is to live today, and who have contributed so enthusiastically to the CPA process.

Let's get our excellent achievements recognised!

