

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 22nd November, 2010

Present: Cllr M S Worrall (Chairman), Cllr N J Heslop (Vice-Chairman), Cllr A W Allison, Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr Ms J A Atkinson, Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr Ms V Branson and Cllr M J Dobson.

Councillors Court and Rogers were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No. 15.21.

Members of the Forum:

Kent County Councillor C Smith; Kent Police, The Bridge Trust, Society of Friends, Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens Association, Tonbridge Art Group, Tonbridge Civic Society, Tonbridge Historical Society, Tonbridge Line Commuters, Tonbridge Lions Club, Tonbridge Sports Association, Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club and the Women's Institute.

Other organisations in attendance:

Tonbridge Arts Festival Committee

Apologies for absence were received from Borough Councillors Aikman, Baldock, Ms Spence and Thornewell; County Councillor Mrs Dagger; Age Concern Tonbridge, St John Ambulance, Tonbridge Music Club and Tonbridge Philharmonic Society.

ACTION
BY

PART 1 - PUBLIC

TF
10/029

MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 13 September 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF
10/030

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman paid tribute to Godfrey Horne MBE, Honorary Freeman of the Borough, County Councillor for Tonbridge and Malling, retired Borough Councillor and former Mayor who had sadly passed away. The Chairman praised Mr Horne's determination to champion Tonbridge, his local knowledge and tenacity in fighting for local causes, such as the Cottage Hospital, and for his valuable

contribution to the many organisations, committees and the community he served. The funeral service would take place at 1130 am on Monday 29 November 2010 in Corpus Christi RC Church, Tonbridge.

The Forum extended their deepest sympathy to his family and observed a two minute silence in memory of Mr Horne.

**TF
10/031**

UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES.

No items were identified, subject to the following points of interest being raised:

§ Minute TF/10/014 (24 May 2010) - Living Later Life to the Full

The Chairman was pleased to announce the recent establishment of an Older Persons Forum. Members were advised that Mr Barry Hughes would act as Chairman and Mr Tony Hayward would be the Vice-Chairman. It was reported that a series of meetings in the forthcoming months would consider the main priorities and the Forum would actively campaign for older persons' issues. The Chairman hoped that the Older Persons' Forum would be invited to become a member of the Local Strategic Partnership.

§ Retrospective Planning Applications:

The Chairman advised that, following the Borough Council and local Members raising concerns about the issue of unauthorised planning development and retrospective applications, senior planning officers had received an invitation from the Department for Communities and Local Government to attend an informal meeting to comment on a proposed approach to planning legislation. A consultation paper on proposed changes to planning legislation had recently been published and recommended changes to the setting of planning fees and higher charges for retrospective applications. The Chairman welcomed this invitation and believed it demonstrated a rare and valuable indication of how local representation and local knowledge could be successful and influential.

He also thanked Mr Peter Cropper of the Hadlow Road Neighbourhood Group for his contribution to the planning challenges.

**TF
10/032**

TONBRIDGE ARTS FESTIVAL 15-24 OCTOBER 2010

Mr Andy Brett, Chairman of the Tonbridge Arts Festival reported on a very successful event, held between 15-24 October 2010. The ten day Festival had hosted a range of events covering performance, literary and visual arts and celebrated the best of home grown talent. Activities that took place included a Jane Austen walk, a story telling competition for local schools, a talk by author Howard Sounes on the Tonbridge heist, an open art competition and Eurovision winners Buck Fizz performing at the grand finale.

Overall, the Festival had been a great success and organisers were extremely pleased with the variety of events on offer and had received many complimentary responses.

Mr Brett explained that the organisers, who were all volunteers, hoped to make the Festival a regular event and May 2012 was being considered for the next one.

The Chairman thanked Mr Brett for his leadership of the Tonbridge Arts Festival Committee and he believed the event was a good example of community working and initiative.

**TF
10/033**

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE: -

The Kent County Council Community Engagement Manager, Loic Flory, opened his services update by advising the Forum that County Councillor Horne's devolved budget was available up to the end of February 2011. Members were invited to contact Mr Flory to make bids for funding.

In summary the services update tabled at the meeting included reference to 'Towards 2010 – finally put to bed', a vision setting out the County Council's aim to help more Kent residents into work; to unlock Kent's potential for regeneration; to give children and young people the best possible start in life; to improve quality of life and to help residents feel safer.

Additionally, particular reference was made to E-petitioning which changed the way that the Kent County Council received petitions from the county's residents. E-petitions were set up and maintained on the County Council's website and 'signatures' were collected online. This allowed petitions and supporting information to be made available to a much wider audience than a paper based petition. Anyone who lived, worked, studied or visited Kent County Council areas could create or sign an E-petition. If

1,000 signatures were received the County Council would debate the issue raised. Traditional paper petitions could still be submitted if preferred.

Bold Steps for Kent:

Mr Flory explained that plans for radical changes were set out in Bold Steps for Kent, the authority's medium term plan for the next four years. The proposals were out for consultation and the full document could be viewed at: www.kent.gov.uk

Bold Steps for Kent identified the need for appropriate and cost effective partnerships, involving health, schools, the voluntary sector and district authorities, in light of significant changes to the way public services were delivered as well as fundamental reductions in funding.

Your Voice Your Services:

The Your Voice Your Services campaign was launched in October to listen to residents' opinions and to involve them in identifying those services which were really valued. Responses so far showed that street lighting, roads and pavements and schools were all important services for the people of Kent, as well as libraries and public transport. Comments could be submitted until 31 December 2010 to: yourvoice@kent.gov.uk

Have Your Say:

Members were advised that the County Council valued residents' ideas and comments on things that mattered to them and wanted to use residents' views and suggestions to learn from their experiences as customers, so that services could be improved and developed. Comments, compliments and complaints could be sent to: haveyoursay@kent.gov.uk or via 08458 247 247. Further information could be found on: www.kent.gov.uk

Members asked for the County Council's response to the recent Ofsted report which found child protection in Kent inadequate. Mr Flory referred to the recent press statement made by Mr Paul Carter, Leader of the Kent County Council, which said that a recovery plan would be implemented and shortcomings would be put right. The County Council would be implementing every recommendation by Ofsted and substantial improvements were promised. The statement continued by fully accepting the findings of the report and offering sincere apologies.

A joint media statement from Kent County Council, Kent Children's Trust, Kent Safeguarding Children Board, NHS

West Kent, NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent, Kent and Medway NHS Trust and Kent Police was also referred to and could be found on: www.kent.gov.uk

The Forum also expressed concern regarding the Local Transport Plan for Kent which made little mention of West Kent and could see funding distributed away from Tonbridge and the surrounding area. The Local Transport Plan was currently out for consultation and Members were invited to comment.

The Chief Executive of the Borough Council advised that the local authority had expressed serious concern about the apparent lack of transport investment in Tonbridge and Malling, given the relatively high levels of development in the Borough compared to other areas of Kent. The importance of transport infrastructure in helping to sustain the improvement of the economy of West Kent was recognised. He advised that the local Members of Parliament's attention had been drawn to the deficiencies in the Local Transport Plan and that Sir John Stanley MP would question this further and ask why his constituency was not receiving an adequate transport infrastructure.

Members discussed the chronic traffic congestion and considered it important to resolve these problems. One solution could be to restore the Redhill to Gatwick train service which would relieve pressure on the M25. Tonbridge Line Commuters advised of a representation being sent to Government arguing against fares rising to subsidise the high speed train service when passengers from Tonbridge did not benefit. The Chief Executive enforced the point that the high speed rail link had the potential for economic disadvantage to the area and it was an error on the part of transport providers to neglect West Kent.

The Vice-Chairman provided a brief update on the A21 upgrade scheme and advised that there was a clear desire on the part of all three West Kent councils involved for a Public Enquiry at the earliest opportunity. The three local Members of Parliament would press this point with the Secretary of State for Transport. It was hoped that by following this course of action the desperately needed road upgrade could commence when funding was available.

The Chief Executive referred to an invitation to Tonbridge Forum Members to attend a Southeastern stakeholder event in Tonbridge at 1800 hours on Monday 29 November 2010. The Managing Director of Southeastern, Mr Charles Horton, would be updating rail user and amenity groups on current developments and Members of the Forum with an interest in local rail services would be welcome to attend.

The Chairman endorsed the comments outlined and indicated that the Borough Council fully supported the concerns raised by the Forum regarding traffic issues in Tonbridge and Malling.

The Chairman thanked Mr Flory for his contribution to the meeting.

TF
10/034

KENT POLICE UPDATE

The Chairman invited Kent Police to provide a brief summary of policing issues within Tonbridge.

Inspector Allen reported that policing measures adopted for Halloween, Bonfire Night and Remembrance Day had been successful and these events had passed without any major incidents.

The Forum was advised that purse thefts were increasing and that extra officers were on patrol in Tonbridge at the key times to act as a deterrent. Additionally, posters warning shoppers of the dangers would be distributed. An event offering safety advice and handing out purse chains was arranged for Thursday 25 November at Waitrose supermarket in Tonbridge.

Inspector Allen was pleased to report that speed initiatives carried out in Tonbridge, and the surrounding area, had resulted in 16 fixed penalty notices and 24 speed awareness courses.

Policing arrangements for the Carnival firework display at the weekend and for Christmas and the New Year were outlined.

Inspector Allen finished his summary with a reminder of a local police presence at the Gateway every Wednesday between 1500 - 1700 hours and thanked Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council for their support.

Members asked that speeding initiatives along Darenth Avenue, Waveney Road, Trench Road and Shipbourne Road be considered.

The Forum discussed the problems associated with motorists parking on pavements and causing difficulties to pedestrians. Inspector Allen responded that this was not illegal unless the vehicle was causing an obstruction and the difficulties of enforcement were outlined. However, Kent Police had understood the point being made and noted the areas of concern.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Allen for his contribution

to the meeting.

**TF
10/035**

COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW UPDATE

The Chief Executive outlined the implications for the Borough Council's financial position following the comprehensive spending review announcements. It was reported that local government was having its funding reduced more harshly than other parts of the public sector and a 30 – 40% reduction was not impossible. Members were warned that it was difficult to predict the outcome for Tonbridge and Malling until the individual grant settlement announcement. This was anticipated on Thursday 2 December 2010.

The Chief Executive was pleased to report that Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council was an efficient organisation compared to some other local authorities. In fact, its approach to financial planning had been praised. This meant that the relatively strong reserves enabled a longer term position to be adopted. It was explained that the Borough Council was taking a ten year view of finances and would avoid taking any decisions now that would impact on services without fully understanding all the implications. The Chief Executive predicted no cuts to current services but warned that there would be no money to invest in new services.

Other measures impacting on the Borough Council's finances were the Government's decision to fund a 0% increase in council tax for the next year, the reduction of funding for council tax benefits and income from fees and charges. The Chief Executive was confident that the Borough Council could achieve the 0% increase in council tax with no reduction in services. Planning, building control and land charges were linked to the housing market and were having a significant impact on the budget position due to the economic downturn.

The Borough Council was embarking on a series of initiatives with neighbouring authorities, such as the sharing of services and joint working partnerships. Members were assured that everything possible was being done to manage the financial position effectively and to minimise the impact to council tax payers.

**TF
10/036**

LOCAL GROWTH: REALISING EVERY PLACE'S POTENTIAL

Reference was made to the recent publication of the White Paper - Local Growth: Realising every place's potential which set out how the Government would put businesses and local communities in charge of their own futures, give

greater incentives for local growth and change the way central government supported and maintained growth.

Points of particular interest related to the abolition of Regional Development Agencies and the establishment of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP). The Chief Executive explained that these Partnerships would be made up of local authority representatives and local businesses and were aimed to stimulate economic development. A LEP based around Kent, Essex and East Sussex had been agreed although the governance arrangements were not yet finalised. However, Members noted that West Kent would be represented in that Partnership as it was important for the region to have a voice in the development of bids.

Other proposals of significance related to the introduction of a New Homes Bonus to reward local authorities for delivering new houses and proposals to review planning legislation. It was noted that if Government grant was reduced the New Homes Bonus would potentially become a significant source of funding to address the budget deficit.

Members were encouraged to watch progress on the Localism White Paper as it might address some areas which still lacked detail in the Local Growth White Paper.

The Forum discussed the funding streams for LEP and how these related to European Regional Partnerships. The Chief Executive conceded this was the subject of considerable debate and the abolition of regions had caused an issue. However, it appeared that funding streams would still be deliverable but directed via central Government for onward distribution.

Additionally, concern was expressed that changes to the planning system might create tensions between local planning authorities and neighbourhood groups.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for his contribution to the meeting and acknowledged the excellent financial planning in place for the Borough Council.

TF
10/037

FREEDOM MARCH

The Chief Executive announced that the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (Queen's and Royal Hampshires), who held a Freedom to the Borough, were exercising their right to march through Tonbridge. Members were reminded that the regiment had seen active service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A date had yet to be finalised but was anticipated for June 2011. Members were asked to support and promote the

event in honour of the excellent job the armed services undertook.

The Forum asked whether the regiment would be given the opportunity to march through West Malling. The Chief Executive supported the idea of the regiment parading through the northern part of the Borough but was unclear whether it was possible logistically until further details were discussed with their commanding officer.

The Chairman thanked Members for their active contribution to the meeting and reminded them that the next Tonbridge Forum was scheduled for Monday 7 February 2010.

The meeting ended at 2105 hours