

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 27th February, 2017

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr C P Smith (Vice-Chairman),
Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr O C Baldock, Cllr Mrs P A Bates,
Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr V M C Branson and Cllr F G Tombolis

Together with representatives from:

The Bridge Trust	Tonbridge Line Commuters,
Kent Police (Tonbridge)	Tonbridge Lions Club,
St John's Ambulance	Tonbridge Music Club,
Society of Friends	Tonbridge Rotary Club,
Tonbridge and Malling Seniors	Tonbridge Sports Association,
Tonbridge Art Group	Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club,
Tonbridge Civic Society	Tonbridge Town Team,
Tonbridge District Scout Council	University of the Third Age
Tonbridge Historical Society,	Women's Institute

Councillor H S Rogers was also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

TF 17/1 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF 17/2 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no updates or actions identified that were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

TF 17/3 KENT COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

Representatives of the Kent Community Rail Partnership (Guy Schofield – Project Officer and Sue Murray – Chairman) explained that the organisation ‘existed to bring together widely varied partners in order to bring social, economic and environmental benefits to the communities served by rural and secondary rail services’.

There was particular focus on the Medway Valley Line, which ran between Strood and Maidstone West and recently extended to include Tonbridge, and Swale Rail, which was the Sittingbourne to Sheerness branch line. Neither of these lines attracted significant investment from the rail companies, although funding contributions were received from South Eastern, Kent County Council and some local authorities and parish councils served by the route.

The aim of the Partnership was to promote and encourage strong relationships with local communities and to engage with new users of all ages. Recent initiatives included 'pop up hubs' and exhibitions at local business and shopping centres to educate and inform commuters and international travellers; guided walks called Rail Trails which suggested local walks and were available for download; adoption for unmanned stations which encouraged volunteers to keep their local stations tidy and well presented. Borough Green was a good example of an adopted station.

Reference was made to the number of listed signalling boxes along the Medway Valley Line, including Aylesford, Snodland and Watlington, which were now at risk due to the introduction of new technologies. Options on how these could be reused and preserved for the future were being considered and any suggestions were welcomed. Given the listed status of these buildings all options would be carefully scrutinised. It was also hoped that the signalling equipment could be retained.

The Partnership was also actively involved in educating young people about the benefits of railway travel and highlighting the dangers of railway lines and trespassing. It was indicated that the manager at Tonbridge station was actively engaged with local residents and committed to making the station a more attractive place. Pictures from local school children were often displayed on the platform as part of this exercise.

Members were reminded that the rail franchise was due to be renewed in 2018 and the Kent Community Rail Partnership was a formal consultee and all were encouraged to contact the organisation with comments about the future of railway provision in the area. As part of their effort to improve services the Partnership were actively seeking the introduction of a half hourly service from Maidstone West to Tonbridge. This request had the support of Kent County Council and the benefits to the community were recognised. In addition, the Department for Transport appeared receptive to the request.

Any suggestions for future events or comments regarding services or renewal of the rail franchise could be passed to the Kent Community Rail Partnership by using the quick enquiry form found on the website at:

<http://www.kentcrp.org.uk/>

In response to a question regarding promotion of the ease of reaching Rochester via Strood, it was confirmed that this was publicised and that many cultural events such as the Sweeps Festival and the Dickens Christmas Festival were just a ten minute walk from Strood station.

The representative from Tonbridge Line Commuters fully supported the work of the Kent Community Rail Partnership and commented that the

frequency of service, particularly from Maidstone West to Tonbridge, affected use of the railway and passenger numbers.

The Chairman advised that the Borough and County Councils remained committed to arguing for a service from Tonbridge to Gatwick and this case would be reiterated during the rail franchise consultation. It was noted that there would be public consultation meetings regarding the renewal of the rail franchise, which would be promoted widely, and everyone was encouraged to participate.

Tonbridge Town Team observed that there were huge opportunities for economic development and linkages to Tonbridge and areas further afield via the Medway Valley Line and these were being explored with the Kent Community Rail Partnership.

Finally, the Chairman thanked Mr Guy Schofield and Mrs Sue Murray for their valuable contribution to the meeting and wished the Kent Community Rail Partnership every success for the future.

TF 17/4 PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER

The Licensing and Community Safety Partnership Manager referred to the Cabinet report of the Director of Central Services and Monitoring Officer which gave details of the proposed Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs). Details of the borough wide restrictions, as well as restrictions for particular geographical areas were included.

It was reported that PSPOs were intended to deal with a particular nuisance or problem in a particular area that was detrimental to the local communities' quality of life. They were designed to ensure that the law abiding majority could use and enjoy public spaces and reduce anti-social behaviour. PSPOs would replace dog control orders, designated public place orders and gating orders and were being put in place to replace existing powers that were disappearing.

The definition of public space included any place to which the public or any section of the public had access, on payment or otherwise, as of right or by virtue of express or implied permission.

After consultation with Borough Council and Kent Police officers it was recommended that a PSPO containing multiple restrictions should be progressed, details of which were set out in Annex 1 to the report. Some of the restrictions were borough wide, such as deterring dog fouling and dogs on lead by direction, and some were specific to particular locations like Haysden Country Park.

The introduction of PSPOs meant that anyone failing to comply with the restrictions could be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice. It was confirmed that the same charges in place now would still apply and these were £80, reduced to £50 on early payment.

Cabinet of 31 January 2017 had agreed to undertake public consultation on the proposals. This consultation period would end on 15 March 2017 and everyone was encouraged to submit a response, especially to highlight any potential concerns or sites that were not included in the proposals. However, it was explained that any potential suggestions for additional orders required sufficient evidence to demonstrate a need. It was reported that the responses to the consultation received so far were favourable and these would be reviewed by Cabinet on 21 March 2017 before final proposals were presented to Council for consideration.

In summary, the measures proposed were to replace orders already in existence borough wide with the new PSPOs.

Finally, the Chairman reiterated the importance of responding to the consultation outlining any concerns and specific sites and reminded that the deadline was 15 March 2017.

In response to a question regarding enforcement, the Forum was advised that it was not realistic to expect 24 hours a day seven days a week cover as the Borough Council nor Kent Police had sufficient capacity to do this. Powers could be passed to designated officers such as park rangers or environmental enforcement officers but no additional staff would be provided for enforcement. However, if evidence was provided action would be taken and whilst Kent Police would not treat PSPOs as a priority there was a good working relationship between them and the Borough Council. Targeted enforcement activity would be arranged when necessary and key measures would be discussed with partners.

Any known areas of concern should be identified via the consultation process and if there was sufficient evidence that a problem existed an additional PSPO would be considered. It was emphasised that evidence of a problem needed to be provided and not just a request from local communities.

TF 17/5 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Sergeant M Ginsberg provided a verbal update of the achievements made in performance and neighbourhood policing. It was reported that Tonbridge and Malling had seen a slight increase in all crime of 10.5% based on a rolling year, although figures for burglary dwelling had reduced slightly. However, crime had risen at both national and local levels and should not be a significant concern. Partnership working continued to be successful in addressing crime.

Police officer numbers remained stable with healthy recruitment. Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) numbers were stabilising and a recruitment drive was ongoing.

The position regarding the following local issues was updated:

- Night Time Economy: Remained quiet police wise
- Gathering in town centres (nuisance vehicles): a mix of engagement, dispersal and road traffic orders had been used to resolve the problem and the current situation was relatively quiet
- Repeat anti-social behaviour associated with McDonalds: Kent Police were working closely with the franchise holder to address and deter youths from loitering. However, it was recognised that this type of business attracted young people. It was noted that the High Street premises was due to close for refurbishment shortly.
- Traveller's unauthorised encampment: Prior to Christmas 2016 travellers had set up an unauthorised encampment in Sovereign Way. This had been swiftly resolved using Section 61 powers.

Kent Police were also looking to restructure some of their officer resource and reallocate them to potential differing roles within the organisation. There was particular focus on creating a Safeguarding Hub resourced by local community support officers. There would be no visible change noticed by the general public but it was hoped that those suffering from mental health and other safeguarding issues would be benefited.

In response to question, the Forum was advised that the highest level of increase (34%) related to violent crime. However, this now included harassment, of which social media contributed 10% to the increase, and domestic abuse. Sergeant Ginsberg was also able to report that there had been no increase in racial abuse and the Borough was seen as a low hate crime area.

Regarding the concerns raised at the last meeting it was confirmed that speeding enforcement checks had taken place in The Ridgeway and Yardley Park. Unfortunately, due to the volume of parked vehicles it was not so easy to conduct speeds checks along Barden Road. However, it was confirmed that Kent Police would not enforce 20 mph limit along Shipbourne Road and this was mainly self-enforcing due to the design of the road.

Reference was made to speeding along the A245 from Hilden Manor which had recently changed to a 30 mph limit and Kent Police were asked whether there was any merit in looking at this further. In response, Sergeant Ginsberg advised that speed checks had been carried out recently in collaboration with Kent Fire and Rescue Services. A number of fines had been issued and it was noted that the majority of these were local people.

TF 17/6 KENT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES UPDATE

The Chairman advised that Kent Fire and Rescue Services had recently undergone changes in their management structure and Group Manager Colin King had moved to a new area of responsibility. Mr David Escudier was the new Group Manager for Tonbridge and he would be invited to participate in the Forum if operational activity allowed.

However, owing to the short notice around these changes there was no Kent Fire and Rescue Service representative present at this meeting and this item was WITHDRAWN from the agenda.

TF 17/7 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Kent County Council Community Liaison Officer (Anne Charman) reported on a number of County initiatives and consultations. A Kent County Council Services Update report setting out more details was attached to the agenda for information.

Particular reference was made to the key points made by the Leader of Kent County Council (Paul Carter) to Full Council on 8 December 2016 regarding the budget pressures being faced and the impacts of providing adult social care. Further to this, the County Council had set the budget on Tuesday 9 February and a Council Tax increase of 3.99% had been agreed, 2% of which was the social care levy.

Current consultation(s) included the Freight Action Plan for Kent (16 January – 12 March 2017) and the recently announced Mental Health Service: Promoting Independence (10 February – 24 March 2017). All Kent County Council consultations could be viewed online at:

<http://consultations.kent.gov.uk/consult.ti>

The Apprenticeships for All was an ongoing campaign offering the opportunity to find rewarding jobs and careers through apprenticeships. An apprenticeship levy would be introduced from 6 April 2017.

Reference was made to the Kent and Medway Business Fund which offered 0% loans between £50,000 and £500,000 to small and medium sized businesses. Further detail was available from: <http://www.kent.gov.uk/business/business-loans-and-funding/kent-and-medway-business-fund>

Members welcomed the news that multi-million pound funding had been given to the Leigh Flood Storage Area and Hildenborough flood defences. The award was as a result of extensive work between Kent County Council, the Environment Agency and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

It was reported that the County Council had received an award for Britain's most improved road for the A227 between Tonbridge High Street and Borough Green.

Finally, the Community Engagement Manager reminded the Panel that she was happy to assist in addressing any issues and liaising with County Members.

The Society of Friends expressed concern at the removal of street lights along the foot/cycle path from the Weir to the entrance to the Memorial Gardens and hoped these would be reinstated as a matter of public safety. The Community Liaison Officer was asked to contact relevant officers within the County Council and/or Kent Highway Services and their response would be shared with the Forum in due course.

TF 17/8 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING SERVICES UPDATE

The Chief Executive provided an update on key points relevant to Tonbridge and these included:

- Leigh Flood Storage Area:

It was reiterated that both the LFSA and Hildenborough schemes were fully funded and flood defence measures would be implemented. This was as a result of bid submitted by the Borough Council, the Environment Agency and Kent County Council.

- Budget and Council Tax 2017/18

Full Council had approved and set the budget and council tax for 2017/18 on 14 February 2017. A 5% increase in council tax had been agreed and this was in line with neighbouring authorities.

It was noted that Tonbridge residents would be paying a special expenses levy from April 2017, following the decision to introduce fairer charging as a result of public consultation and as discussed at the last meeting of the Forum. This represented a figure of £50.45 identified as 'special expenses' on the council tax bill and was in line with figures for parish councils. Figures for local charges (special expenses) were in line with services received. It was also reiterated that the General Charge element of the council tax bill had reduced.

- River Walk enhancements:

In principle, proposals for a new and improved medical centre on the Teen and Twenty site had been agreed by the Borough Council. The medical practice would be consulting with their patients in due course. Any planning application coming forward as a result would follow the usual consultation process.

- Local Plan update:

The consultation on the 'options strategy' had received a large number of responses and these were currently being assessed. The outcomes would be reported in due course. It was also noted that the recently introduced Housing White Paper had implications for the Local Plan.

Finally, the Chairman referred to the Tonbridge Half Marathon and the Christmas Festival both of which had been hugely successful and would be repeated again this year.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm