

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Tuesday, 2nd July, 2019

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr J R S Lark (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr Mrs P A Bates, Cllr M D Boughton, Cllr V M C Branson, Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr A E Clark, Cllr D W King, Cllr K King, Cllr M R Rhodes and Cllr Miss G E Thomas.

Together with:

- County Councillor M Payne,
- The Bridge Trust,
- Kent Police (Tonbridge),
- Tonbridge Civic Society,
- Tonbridge District Scout Council,
- Tonbridge Historical Society,
- Tonbridge Lions Club,
- Tonbridge Music Club,
- Tonbridge Sports Association,
- Tonbridge Town Team,
- University of the Third Age; and
- Women's Institute

Councillors N Foyle, J L Sergison, M A J Hood and F A Hoskins were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Borough Councillor F G Tombolis,
- County Councillor R Long,
- Society of Friends,
- Tonbridge and Malling Seniors,
Tonbridge Area Churches Together

TF 19/9 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Tonbridge Forum, which was the first of the new municipal year.

Reference was made to the public question time traditionally held immediately before the start of the formal meeting and the Chairman indicated that a new approach would be piloted from September.

It was proposed that question time be included as a formal agenda item with questions submitted in advance so that responses could be given at the meeting. However, this would not prevent questions being raised on the evening although these might receive a written response out of meeting.

Further details on the new arrangements would be circulated in due course.

TF 19/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF 19/11 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 19/12 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman referred to the local election held on Thursday 2 May and expressed appreciation at being re-elected as a Member and Leader of the Council. The Conservative Group had retained their majority in Tonbridge and Malling and recognised the importance of serving their residents. The political composition of the Borough Council was now 39 Conservative, 9 Liberal Democrat, 3 Independent Alliance (Kent), 2 Green and 1 Labour.

The recent appointments of Ward Members in Tonbridge set out below were noted:

- Mayor – Councillor Mrs Jill Anderson
- Chair of Area 1 Planning Committee (Councillor Vivian Branson)
- Vice-Chair of Area 1 Planning Committee (Councillor Matt Boughton)
- Chairman of Communities and Housing Advisory Board (Councillor Jon Botten)
- Vice-Chairman of Planning and Transportation Advisory Board (Councillor Jon Botten)
- Chairman of Street Scene and Environment Services Advisory Board (Councillor Mark Davis)
- Vice-Chairman of Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board (Councillor Georgina Thomas)
- Vice-Chairman of Economic Regeneration Advisory Board (Councillor Frixos Tombolis)
- Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Councillor Janet Sergison)

- Vice-Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Councillor Frixos Tombolis)
- Chairman of Tonbridge Forum (Councillor Nicolas Heslop)
- Vice-Chairman of Tonbridge Forum (Councillor James Lark)

- Cabinet Member for Community Services (Councillor Mark Rhodes)

The Mayor was invited to address the Forum and expressed pleasure at her appointment and for the opportunity to meet volunteer and community groups who worked tirelessly to help others. She had recently attended a school cricket festival in Kings Hill which had been well attended and greatly enjoyed by everyone.

Finally, the Mayor would be pleased to attend any community or local events and this could be arranged via the Mayor's Office (email: mayors.office@tmbc.gov.uk)

TF 19/13 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The Chairman (in his role as Leader of the Borough Council) provided context for the setting of council tax and comparative costs related to parish council precepts. His presentation illustrated the services in Tonbridge supported/funded by the special expenses element. These included responsibility for the closed churchyards at St Peter and St Paul and at St Stephen; maintaining open spaces, parks and play areas; sport grounds and running and supporting local events.

The Chairman then went on to highlight recent activity in Tonbridge included numerous events in Haysden Country Park, a new path in Friendship Wood, new surfacing for a children's play area, a tree planting project at Tonbridge Cemetery and Tonbridge Castle, habitat improvements with Medway Valley Countryside Project and reinstatement works to Tonbridge Castle Motte.

Gratitude was also expressed to the volunteers involved in the litter picks in the Spring.

In response to a question from the floor regarding developer contributions (known as s106 monies), the Chief Executive clarified that one off capital works could benefit from these. However, revenue and running costs were still the responsibility of the Borough Council and these were covered by special expenses where appropriate. It was also indicated that the principle of applying a local charge had been tested as part of a public consultation undertaken by the Borough Council when special expenses were first considered. If any alternative proposals regarding local charging were proposed the Borough Council would give them proper consideration.

A further question was asked regarding charging rates for charity and commercial events. Members were reminded of a recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee review which had looked at concessionary rates. The recommendations arising from this review had yet to be determined.

The following updates were also provided:

Waste Services Contract:

The new contractor (Urbaser) had started in March and was currently working to previous service arrangements. New operational arrangements would start on 30 September and would include separate weekly food collections, fortnightly dry mixed recycling collections (including plastics, glass and cartons) and recycling collections of textiles, household batteries and small electrical appliances.

All households would receive an information pack through the post in advance of the new service arrangements.

Currently, 8,000 households had subscribed to the garden waste collection scheme and the early bird discount offered ended on 2 August 2019. It was noted that delivery of new garden waste bins would start on 15 July and new food bins and caddies would be delivered to all households in August.

Further advice and information was available on www.tmbc.gov.uk/recycleforall

Shopfront Improvement Scheme:

There had been a good level of interest in the Scheme which had launched in March 2019 and provided grant assistance to independent retailers in Tonbridge and other retail centres in the Borough. Four grants had already been awarded with others currently being processed. The initiative would close once all funding had been allocated.

Rochester Bridge Trust Exhibition:

A 'Crossing the River Medway' event telling the story of the bridges over the river was being held at Tonbridge Castle until 31 January 2020.

Swimming Pool Bridge:

It was hoped that this would be open later in the year as the issue with the utility providers had been resolved. However, Members were cautioned that, as with any significant building project, the timetable was always subject to change.

TF 19/14 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Sergeant Turtle provided a verbal update on the achievements made in performance and the neighbourhood policing agenda.

There had been a small reduction in PCSO numbers which created significant challenges across the Borough, due to the need to share resources. However, an additional PCSO was anticipated in the Autumn.

It was also reported that a new beat officer in Tonbridge had already made a positive contribution to the town by working with partner agencies to deal with untaxed vehicles and rough sleepers. From September this work would be supported by an additional beat officer who would be deployed to the town centre and other areas of the Borough as required.

Kent Police were also hoping to engage a Safer Towns Co-Ordinator to work with local businesses and shops.

Recent operations and trends included:

- Anti-social behaviour, with a particular focus on Town Lock, would be targeted by working with partner agencies and the use of dispersal notices;
- Rough sleepers had moved to the Botany area. Kent Police continued to work closely with Porchlight and the Borough Council to engage with individuals;
- The Kent Police website would be updated later in the year to enable residents to submit comments and suggestions regarding priorities;
- Kent Police were active on social media and all were encouraged to follow the twitter account @kent_police for regular updates on crime trends, activity and results;

Particular reference was made to the recent spate of youths on bicycles causing a nuisance. This was a significant problem for residents in the north of the Borough and Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling Community Safety Units were raising awareness for the benefit of parents. Dispersal powers could be used to address specific problem areas.

Members of the Forum expressed frustration and disappointment at the difficulty in addressing anti-social behaviour and the perceived lack of police attendance when issues were reported. In response, Sergeant Turtle reiterated that Kent Police were aware of the issues and encouraged the continuation of reporting. Unfortunately, due to issues with staffing and availability of officers, attendance could not be guaranteed and was dependent on priority activity on any day. Particular

issues at Town Lock and Long Mead Road would be discussed with the Community Safety Partnership to see if action could be progressed.

TF 19/15 POP UP BUSINESS SCHOOL

The representative of the Pop-Up Business School (Rhys Williams – Project Officer) provided details of a live event taking place in Tonbridge aimed to help with self-employment and small business set up.

This event would take place between 1000 – 1500 hours from 30 September until 4 October in the Angel Centre, Tonbridge and offered practical ways to get a business idea off the ground regardless of experience. The event was open to everyone free of charge.

Further information was available from:

<https://www.popupbusinessschool.co.uk/tonbridge.html>

TF 19/16 TONBRIDGE STATION AND HIGH STREET UPDATE

The report of the Kent County Council Transport Innovations Programme Manager provided an update on the progress being made on the Tonbridge Station improvements. Although the main works had been completed the scheme would continue to be monitored and adjustments made as required.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste at Kent County Council (Michael Payne) reminded Members that pedestrian safety was a key objective of the project and that access and egress to the station had been greatly improved as a result. County Councillor Payne was pleased to report that buses and taxis appeared to have integrated into the scheme successfully and the 'kiss and drop' layby was a welcome inclusion.

A need for audible indicators on the lights had been identified and it was proposed that these were operational during the day time only to avoid disturbing local residents at night. Yellow box markings at the traffic signals had been completed and high level green men installed at all crossings. It was hoped that these measures would improve pedestrian safety.

In addition a stage 3 road safety audit would be undertaken to highlight any outstanding areas of concern that needed to be addressed. Once complete, a final walk through would be carried out with the contractor to record any construction defects that might have arisen. It was noted that the contractor was obliged to rectify any issues for up to a year after completion.

Particular reference was made to Bus Stop G in the High Street and that this would be moved two-thirds off the carriageway to improve the road

width and traffic flow. This work would be progressed during the summer months.

The following concerns, comments and points were raised, discussed and noted:

- Taxi drivers allowing engines to idle at certain points in the town. This was a particular concern due to the effects of pollution on children. The Chairman committed to passing this concern to the Head of Licensing, Community Safety and Customer Services for addressing.
- A request for pollution levels to be monitoring during the works to Bus Stop G when a one way traffic flow would be in place.
- Air Quality Monitoring was raised as a general concern and the request for monitoring in the High Street was repeated. The Chairman indicated that these issues were discussed regularly at the Street Scene and Environment Services Advisory Board.
- Monitoring of traffic congestion at Vale Road and the High Street were also suggested.
- The necessity for the second set of lights by the Waterloo Road crossing had been tested.
- The appearance of Station Approach continued to be a cause of concern. However, the Chairman advised that he had recently met with the Senior Director for Regeneration at Network Rail to discuss their investment in stations. It was hoped that improvements at Tonbridge, Hildenborough and Borough Green stations would be considered as a result of these discussions.

All of these points were noted by the County Councillor for Tonbridge (Michael Payne); the Chairman (in his role as Leader of the Borough Council) and the Chief Executive and these would be raised with relevant officers at Kent County Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

TF 19/17 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The County Councillor for Tonbridge (Michael Payne) provided details of a number of County initiatives and consultations. The headline messages of relevance to Tonbridge included:

- In partnership with Compaid, Kent County Council had introduced an electric minibus to help disabled and vulnerable people. The vehicle had been adapted to be fully accessible for everyone and would help test the viability of electric vehicles. This was not only a first for the county but a first for Europe.

- The County Council were committed to their Highways Maintenance Programme of resurfacing roads and repairing potholes. There had been a significant increase in funding and Tonbridge and Malling had been allocated approximately £600k for repairs.
- The deadline for comments to the Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) consultation was 14 July 2019.
- The Kent Nature Partnership Biodiversity Strategy consultation was open from 1 July until 1 September 2019.
- The Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy consultation was open from 2 July until 23 September 2019.
- There would be a focus on the Kent Year of Green Action at the County Show over the coming weekend.

Further information on current [consultations](#) was available on the Kent County Council website.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm