

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 1st March, 2021

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 Councillors Mr R Long and Mr M Payne and representatives of:

- The Bridge Trust,
- Tonbridge Area Churches Together,
- Tonbridge District Scout Council,
- Tonbridge Historical Society,
- Tonbridge Rotary Club,
- Tonbridge Sports Association,
- Tonbridge Town Team, and
- University of the Third Age

Councillors R P Betts, N Foyle, M A J Hood, F A Hoskins, D Lettington, Mrs A S Oakley and J L Sergison were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor F G Tombolis, Kent Police (Tonbridge), Society of Friends, Tonbridge and Malling Seniors, Tonbridge Civic Society and Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club.

TF 21/1 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF 21/2 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no actions identified.

TF 21/3 KENT POLICE UPDATE

As a result of operational pressures and significant activity in the Town Centre related to a suspicious package on the afternoon of the meeting, Kent Police were not in attendance. Any specific community or town issues that Members wished to raise with Kent Police were to be emailed to allison.parris@tmbs.gov.uk for onward circulation to Inspector Elizabeth Jones for addressing.

Issues noted at the meeting included parking on Vale Rise and broken glass on the cycle lane at the top of Quarry Hill impacting on cyclists.

TF 21/4 BOROUGH COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The report of the Chief Executive and the Management Team, presented to Cabinet on 26 January 2021, provided an overview on several aspects as the Borough Council and its communities continued to adapt to living with coronavirus.

Particular reference was made to the nationwide vaccination programme and the Chairman, in his role as Leader of the Borough Council, was pleased that, through the efforts of Members and Officers, a mass vaccination centre had been secured for West Kent. The facility at the Angel Centre, Tonbridge was well organised by the NHS and the operation would be regularly reviewed, assessed and monitored by the Borough Council.

The Chairman also welcomed a new symptomatic test and trace centre at the Upper Castle Field car park which would be managed by the NHS and monitored by the Borough Council.

Whilst the number of Covid-19 cases within Tonbridge and Malling continued to decrease and the national position looked optimistic, the Chairman emphasised the need to remain cautious and to adhere to Government guidance.

The Borough Council continued to distribute grant funding to businesses as quickly as possible and there had been a high level of interest. Currently, approximately £28m of financial support had been distributed. Members recorded appreciation for the timely and effective administration of the grant schemes.

Particular reference was made to the Additional Restrictions Grant which was available to help businesses still trading but impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Details of grant funding available were summarised at paragraph 1.6 of the Cabinet report.

It was reiterated that the Borough Council would work with communities, residents and businesses as the lockdown measures were relaxed. In addition, it was reported that increased visitor numbers to the Country Parks and around public open spaces continued to present significant challenges around social distancing, mass gatherings, anti-social behaviour and littering.

In response to a question related to a lack of an asymptomatic test centre in the Tonbridge area, the Chairman advised that there were facilities available at the Hop Farm and in Tunbridge Wells and that further test facilities were a subject for the NHS.

TF 21/5 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING SERVICES UPDATE

Members of the Cabinet provided updates on a number of issues relevant to their portfolios:

(1) Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan:

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure (Councillor David Lettington) thanked the Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group for their comments regarding the Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan. It was indicated that the Chairman of the Joint Transportation Board had provided a full response to the Group and that the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board would consider the Plan during the summer.

(2) Local Plan:

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Infrastructure provided an update on the progress of the Local Plan and indicated that, in the opinion of the Planning Inspector, the 'duty to co-operate' had not been met.

In consultation with external legal support, the Borough Council had robustly challenged these views. A detailed written response had been submitted to both the Planning Inspector and the Secretary of State. There had also been a request that the Secretary of State intervene on behalf of the Borough Council and direct the Planning Inspector to continue with the Local Plan hearings.

It was also noted that the local Members of Parliament supported the position of the Borough Council and had also written to the Secretary of State.

A detailed update would be provided to the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board to be held on Tuesday 2 March 2021.

(3) Waste Services:

In response to questions from the Forum, the Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Environment Services (Councillor Robin Betts) reiterated that the ongoing pandemic and lockdown restrictions had impacted significantly on the waste services contractor. Currently, the service was focusing on collection of refuse and recycling from households which remained a top priority. However, it was recognised that street cleansing and emptying of litter bins remained a significant issue for residents. It was hoped that the relaxation of lockdown measures would enable these issues to be addressed as staff could be reallocated to new priorities.

TF 21/6 TONBRIDGE BICYCLE USERS GROUP - NOMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

The Chairman welcomed the request for the Tonbridge Bicycle Users Group to become a formal member of the Tonbridge Forum. However, in response to a detailed discussion around establishing criteria and a set of ground rules for membership it was suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertake a review of Tonbridge Forum attendance, membership criteria and rules.

The importance of retaining openness and inclusiveness was recognised and Members reiterated the need for everyone to feel welcome and encouraged to participate.

TF 21/7 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The County Councillors for Tonbridge (Michael Payne and Richard Long) provided an update on County initiatives and consultations.

Particular reference was made to the 20mph speed restriction currently being piloted around the town centre and which was still open for consultation. It was recognised that community support was essential in enabling speed restrictions to succeed and the outcomes from the consultation could influence any changes to the scheme.

Councillor Payne was pleased to report that the number of positive coronavirus cases was lower in Tonbridge and Malling than the Kent average and good progress continued to be made on the mass vaccination programme. In addition, support was available to enable schools to implement testing when they reopened from 8 March. Councillor Long expressed appreciation to teachers and all support staff for continuing to provide education, either at school or online, throughout the pandemic.

The first phase of a Road Resurfacing Programme was progressing well and would continue until the end of March. Work had been carried out on the A26 Vale Rise Roundabout and Tonbridge High Street; whilst repairs to Bordyke would commence shortly. All of these works had regard to environmental impact controls as the contractor used biodegradable fuel across all plants and electric vehicles where possible.

TF 21/8 TONBRIDGE THEATRE AND ART GROUP (OAST THEATRE) - DETAILS OF ONLINE EXHIBITION

In the absence of the Tonbridge Theatre and Art Group representative due to ill health there were no details provided regarding the online exhibition. However, the current Winter Exhibition could be viewed via the Oast Theatre [website](#).

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm