

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 14th September, 2015

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr C P Smith (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs P A Bates, Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr Ms S V Spence and Cllr F G Tombolis and County Councillor Mr R Long.

Together with representatives from:

The Bridge Trust, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, Kent Police (Tonbridge), St John's Ambulance, Tonbridge Allotments and Gardens, Tonbridge Art Group, Tonbridge Area Churches Together, Tonbridge Citizen's Advice Bureau, Tonbridge District Scout Council, Tonbridge Historical Society, Tonbridge Line Commuters, Tonbridge Music Club, Tonbridge Rotary Club and Tonbridge Town Team.

Councillor O C Baldock was also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J A Anderson, Ms J A Atkinson, D J Cure, V M C Branson, Society of Friends, Tonbridge and Malling Seniors, Tonbridge Angels Football Club, Tonbridge Philharmonic Society, Tonbridge Red Cross, Tonbridge Sports Association, Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club and Women's Institute.

TF 15/8 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF 15/9 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no actions identified.

TF 15/10 CHAIRMAN ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman referred to the activities in Tonbridge over the weekend (12/13 September 2015) and thanked all organisers and participants involved in the events which had been a great success for the town.

- Dragon Boat Race

This had attracted 20 boats and thanks were given to the Tonbridge Town Team and Borough Councillor Spence for their contribution. Tonbridge Lions were also thanked for their continued support.

- Mediaeval Fayre

Thanks were extended to Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council officers

- Heritage Open Days

This initiative had taken place over 12-13 September to celebrate architecture and culture by offering free access to properties usually closed to the public or normally charging for admission. The Chairman thanked all the participating properties for their involvement.

- Haysden Country Park

The Chairman advised that the Country Park had successfully gained another Parks and Green Spaces green flag award. This was the tenth consecutive year and particular gratitude was extended to the volunteers who maintained the park to such a high standard.

TF 15/11 REVIEW OF TONBRIDGE FORUM

The report of the Chief Executive provided an update on the current Overview and Scrutiny Committee review into how the Borough Council engaged with local community groups and parish councils.

All external Forum members had been invited to complete a short questionnaire about how the Tonbridge Forum operated and whether improvements could be made. However, at the request of the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) the consultation period had been extended until 25 September 2015 to allow more time for responses to be made.

It was confirmed that non returns would be discounted and not included as a negative response. In addition, Members were advised that the majority response so far indicated support for retaining the Forum but possibly in a different format.

The Chairman encouraged all member organisations to complete a questionnaire if they had not already done so. This would enable the Member Panel undertaking the review to be fully informed of local views on this issue.

TF 15/12 LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

The Head of Planning and the Planning Policy Manager provided a presentation highlighting the key issues and setting the context for the Local Plan. At the request of the Chairman this would be circulated with the Minutes for information.

Members were updated on the important progress made towards the preparation of the Local Plan with particular reference to the initial outcome of the Call for Sites exercise which had closed on 1 September 2015. It was emphasised that this was an important milestone in preparation of the Local Plan and significant public interest was anticipated. As part of this exercise there had been 220 site submissions across the borough as a whole and it was noted that not all of these would come forward and were dependent upon technical evaluation and assessment.

Locations of site submissions were outlined and those of particular relevance to Tonbridge highlighted.

The Forum was advised that the identified sites had no status and at this stage were merely submissions of interest. A full assessment of the potential sites to inform options for development and land allocations was now required. Due to the number and scale of sites being assessed the original timetable had been revised to allow sufficient time for evidence gathering and proper technical evaluation around suitability, affordability, deliverability and/or constraints.

Members asked questions and raised a number of issues around community infrastructure, building on flood plains and providing assistance to refugees. Officers responded and noted the comments expressed for further consideration as part of the assessment process. The Forum was also advised that flood areas and the Green Belt represented significant challenges for some strategic sites and these would be fully considered. It was also indicated that the position regarding refugees was constantly monitored but this would only represent a very small increase in demand as most migrants to the Borough were from other parts of the South East or London.

TF 15/13 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Inspector M Hutcheon provided a verbal update of the achievements made in performance and neighbourhood policing. It was reported that Tonbridge and Malling remained a low crime area despite a slight increase of 5% in victim based crime. Partnership working remained successful in addressing crime.

Recent police initiatives included Operation Lerwick, aimed at addressing youth related anti-social behaviour in East Peckham; Op Spitfire focused around East Malling and working with troubled families; Op Hurdle, investigating objects thrown from the M20 bridge and which had seen a reduction in incidents.

There had also been successes related to shed thefts in North Tonbridge and Hildenborough as a recent stop check had resulted in two arrests and property recovered. Members were reminded to mark property to make it easier for them to be returned. In addition, as a

result of good partnership working with the Borough Council the area around the Slade crossroads had been tidied up, which had contributed to the reduction in low level crime and the establishment of a local neighbourhood watch scheme.

With regard to Tonbridge High Street, Kent Police would work with the Borough Council and Kent Highways to see if traffic flow could be improved as a result of the 'no right' turn.

Particular reference was made to the anticipated reduction in public sector funding and the need for Kent Police to make further budget savings. The Force remained committed to minimising disruption to front line delivery as a result of any further restructuring. In addition, it was expected that districts would remain co-terminus with local authorities. Further detail would emerge in due course.

Finally, Inspector Hutcheon referred to a recruiting opportunity for Police Special Constables within Tonbridge and Malling. An event would be held at the Angel Centre on Thursday 22 October from 1900 to 2100 hours and would consist of the following:

- A presentation for anyone interested in joining the Special Constabulary
- Opportunities to speak with serving Specials
- Find out more about a new, interactive training package which meant that 75% of the preparation could be done online.

Members were encouraged to promote this event locally and further information was available at:

http://www.kent.police.uk/join_us/specials/specials_events.html

TF 15/14 KENT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES UPDATE

Group Manager C King provided a verbal update on recent initiatives and operations undertaken by Kent Fire and Rescue Services.

There had been a small (10%) increase in incidents in Kent although there was nothing significant in Tonbridge. It was reported that generally there had been a large reduction in the need for Kent Fire and Rescue Services.

Recent activities included advice on chimney safety and offering informal advice and guidance to small and medium sized businesses on general fire safety and making places of work safer. The Service was also looking at other ways it could add value to the community and where it could offer assistance by providing alternative and complementary services. For example, the Fire Service were keen to offer assistance to the ambulance service, which had seen an increased demand, by undertaking additional first aid training so they could help make

interventions if they were the first emergency service on the scene or nearest to the incident.

Reference was made to the future and the need to make savings, in line with many other public sector organisations. As a result the Fire Service were looking to share premises and use their existing building stock more effectively by providing opportunities for organisations to use their facilities.

Tonbridge Town Team offered to promote information from Kent Fire and Rescue Services on their facebook page and website.

TF 15/15 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 tabled at the meeting for information.

Members were advised that by subscribing to Kent County Council's free emailing service residents could receive important information and news as it became available. A valid email address was required and would be used only to provide information on topic preferences subscribed to. For more information visit: www.kent.gov.uk

All KCC consultations could be found online and Members were encouraged to sign up to the consultation directory:

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

Particular reference was made to the major improvement work to Tonbridge High Street which had started in August. The regeneration project was being delivered by KCC in partnership with the Borough Council and aimed to enhance the town's main shopping area to boost the local economy.

It was noted that work would temporarily cease between 22 November 2015 and 3 January 2016 inclusive to minimise the effect on local businesses over the Christmas period.

In response to a question regarding implications for businesses during the High Street improvement works, the Chairman suggested that any concerns and/or comments be passed to the Borough Council's Economic Regeneration Officer (Jeremy Whittaker) for further engagement with traders.

Reference was made to the removal of kerbs from the High Street and whether disability groups, particularly the Guide Dogs for the Blind, had any comments. County Councillor C Smith indicated that disability groups would have been consulted with but was unsure of the outcome.

The Chairman offered to try and clarify this point and provide feedback out of meeting.

Anyone requiring further information on any of the subjects in the Update report could contact the Kent County Community Liaison Officer on anne.charman@kent.gov.uk

The local borough Member for the Judd ward (Councillor Peter Bolt) referred to Ridgeview School and asked whether plans were yet available to comment on. The Community Liaison Officer offered to contact the Area Education Officer for more information and provide feedback on progress out of meeting.

TF 15/16 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING SERVICES UPDATE

The Chief Corporate Policy Officer provided an update on key points relevant to Tonbridge and referred to the Town Lock development. Good progress was being made although there was a revised completion date of February 2016. There was ongoing liaison with local residents and monthly updates were available on the Borough Council's website.

Reference was made to Street Monitor Guidance booklets which had recently been updated. Copies were available on request from Environmental Services. The Borough Council was keen to recruit local Street Monitors and volunteers were encouraged to participate.

The Tonbridge Half Marathon was taking place on 4 October 2015 and a team, comprising Borough Council officers, in aid of one of the Mayor's charities (The Bridge Trust) were participating.

A Seniors Information and Advice Day was arranged for 1 October 2015 between 1000 – 1400 hours at the Angel Centre and everyone was asked to publicise the event where possible.

Finally, reference was made to the crossing on Cannon Lane at the junction of Hadlow Road which was considered dangerous by local residents. It was noted that part of the KCC improvements to the High Street and traffic flow around the town might improve this junction. It was also noted that Councillor Lancaster, the local Member for Medway ward, had been lobbying the County Council for improvements.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm