

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 8th February, 2016

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr C P Smith (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr Mrs P A Bates, Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr D J Cure, Cllr V M C Branson, Cllr F G Tombolis and County Councillor Mr R Long.

Together with representatives from:

Kent Fire and Rescue Service, Kent Police (Tonbridge), Society of Friends, Tonbridge Art Group, Tonbridge Civic Society, Tonbridge District Scout Council, Tonbridge Historical Society, Tonbridge Line Commuters, Tonbridge Music Club, Tonbridge Philharmonic Society, Tonbridge Rotary Club, Tonbridge Sports Association, Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club, Tonbridge Town Team, University of the Third Age and Women's Institute

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ms J A Atkinson, T Edmondston-Low, R D Lancaster and Tonbridge Area Churches Together

TF 16/1 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF 16/2 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no actions identified

TF 16/3 DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK

The Dementia Friendly (Tonbridge) Group announced that Dementia Awareness week would take place from 15 – 22 May 2016. This was extended to the whole month of May in Tonbridge. A number of events would take place throughout the town to encourage community engagement, participation and support of those suffering from or affected by dementia.

Further details of activities and how people could get involved would be available shortly via the Building Dementia Tonbridge Facebook page.

Many of the events focused on 'sights, sounds and smells of yesterday' to stimulate memory and some of those scheduled included the following:

- 'Down Memory Lane' – a photographic exhibition in Tonbridge library for the whole month
- 'Sounds of Sinatra' – a concert in Medway Hall, Angel Centre on Saturday 7 May with The Clef Hangers big band. Tickets were £19 each (email: john@theclefangers.com) A retiring collection would be made for dementia awareness
- Informal Dementia Café in the Angel Centre 1400-1600 on Thursday 12 May
- Launch of a new informal Dementia Cafe in the Methodist Hall, Higham Lane at 1030 am on Saturday 14 May. Entertainment by Tom Carradine
- Dementia Friends Awareness session 1330-1430 at Inspirations Hair Salon, 181 High Street on Monday 16 May
- Health walk from Tonbridge Castle 1000 on Wednesday 18 May. This was half an hour and suitable for those living with dementia and their carers
- Exhibition at Tonbridge Library on evacuees during World War II on Thursday 19 May 1800-1900. Followed by a Dementia Friends Awareness session at 19.15-2000 hours
- Down Memory Lane at the Old Fire Station on Sunday 15, Monday 16 and Tuesday 17 May at 1200-1800 hours. An exhibition of fire service artefacts and photographs with a drop in café for dementia support
- Opening of sensory garden at 1400 in Angel Square on Saturday 21 May
- Stall at Tonbridge Food and Drink Festival on 21-22 May. This event would take place on the Castle Lawn. A home front static nostalgic display with demonstration of cooking with rations was to be confirmed
- Dementia Café at the Angel Centre on Thursday 26 May at 1400-1600 hours

Retailers were encouraged to open their premises and hold dementia friendly sessions and Members of the Forum were asked to promote the initiative to help raise awareness and understanding of the condition.

The Chairman offered on behalf of the Borough Council to add the events diary to the Tonbridge and Malling website and to noticeboards throughout the borough. It was confirmed, via the Dementia Friendly Tonbridge group, that all channels of communication would be used to promote the events from new online technologies to the more traditional methods.

TF 16/4 TONBRIDGE HIGH STREET IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

Mr Jamie Watson of Kent County Council provided an update on the progress being made on the Tonbridge High Street Improvement Scheme. The project involved widening and resurfacing of pavements together with a range of other improvements between the Vale Road roundabout up to the 'Big Bridge'.

It was acknowledged that the start of the project had been challenging and reference was made to the pressures on the surrounding road network due to the road management measures in place, particularly the introduction of the one way northbound between Vale Road and Bordyke.

To improve relationships with local residents and businesses an improved communication strategy had been adopted and included the creation of a new website - <http://www.tonbridgehighstreet.org/> - where feedback could be submitted and leaflets providing information on progress had been delivered to local businesses and were available at the Gateway. The website was updated weekly with latest news, progress and planned work. There would also be an advertising campaign advising that the High Street was open for business as usual.

In addition, an increased workforce had been employed and was now working six days a week with the potential for this to be extended to seven if necessary. Good progress was being made on Phase 1 and it was anticipated that the April completion date would be met. A recent meeting with retailers had been positive with businesses reporting an increase in trade.

Planned work for the upcoming weeks included block paving on the eastern footway and the 'tree pit' in the Botany was due to be refilled and test holes dug to find a new location for its replacement.

In response to a question regarding street furniture, Forum Members were advised that there would not be a distinct alternative to what currently existed other than that benches would be more modern.

Members also expressed concern about the continuation of the no right hand turn into Medway Wharf Road, especially if enforcement action was not taken to control this illegal manoeuvre. It was noted that Kent Highways did not have the authority to take enforcement action. Kent Police had undertaken enforcement in the past and would continue to do

so but indicated that it would not be a top priority for them. However, Kent County Council noted the concerns raised and suggested that this issue could be revisited in the longer term once the scheme had been completed and bedded in.

With regard to the London Road bus shelter the Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services advised that the Borough Council intended to replace this as part of a new contract agreement. Further information could be provided out of meeting.

Finally reference was made to the introduction of 20 mph zones and whether these could be extended. These would be reviewed as part of Phase 2 which was due to start in April 2016.

TF 16/5 REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: RECOMMENDATIONS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Scrutiny and Partnership Manager advised of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations following the review into how the Borough Council engaged with local community groups and parish councils. Those of relevance to the Tonbridge Forum included:

- the Tonbridge Forum be retained but reduced to two meetings each year.
- meetings to be held in the Council Chamber at Tonbridge Castle.
- a review of the membership be undertaken to enable members to withdraw from the Forum if they wished to do so, or to confirm their continued membership or just opt to receive published minutes.
- consideration be given to a reduction of Council Members attending to allow for a more informal community meeting rather than a formal Council 'Panel' as at present.
- the format of future meetings be changed with a view to implementing a 'round table' style of meeting with community members encouraged to raise items.

Members expressed support for the continuation of the Forum as it encouraged participation and communication of messages important to Tonbridge. Many Members felt that it was the only vehicle available to know what was happening in the Town.

The Chairman reiterated his support for the Tonbridge Forum and emphasised the aspiration of making it relevant with an active and participating membership.

In addition, the Borough Council recognised the value of improving communication with local organisations and as part of the review contact

details of representatives would be updated. This communication would include both modern and traditional methods such as email notifications and letters.

TF 16/6 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Acting Inspector M Ginsberg 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 and one of the safest places in the county and country, despite a slight increase of 1% in the last month. Partnership working continued to be successful in addressing crime.

However, there had been a 12% overall increase over the year and this was due in part to more accurate recording of crime, increased reporting of incidents and fewer resources.

Shoplifting offences had increased by 14% across Tonbridge and Malling and was potentially related to drug activity/gangs and poverty. It was noted that this was a problem nationally and not just local to Tonbridge.

There had been successful arrests related to drug dealing in Tonbridge and positive action taken to address anti-social behaviour at the Youth Hub. The latter had been resolved by the Police Community Support Officers supporting staff and engaging with youths.

Reference was made to the Police Spending Review announcement in November which had seen police budgets protected, although it remained difficult to predict the financial implications for the longer term. It was reported that increased threats from extremists and child exploitation required greater funding and created pressures on resources. Officer numbers remained stable and Kent Police were actively recruiting. However, the number of Police Community Support Officers was reducing due to 'natural wastage' and there were no plans to recruit any further.

Recent police initiatives included:

- Op Ballpoint: Addressed issues of vandalism and intimidation in Trench by increasing patrols and local PCSO engaging with young people.
- Op Encircle: Increased visibility in Tonbridge during lead up to Christmas to target shoplifters.
- Op Hummingbird: Addressed theft from sheds by offering crime prevention advice and encouraging people to mark and register property.

- Op Cactus: Promotion of road safety around schools and educating parents about parking responsibly.
- Two roadshows in conjunction with Community Safety Partnership offering advice to the public on how to protect property.

With regard to the right hand turn off the High Street into Medway Wharf it was confirmed that Kent Police had undertaken enforcement action at that location and raised concerns with Kent County Council. Once the work was completed consideration would be given to undertaking further enforcement work but it could not be a priority.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that PCSOs would be encouraged to challenge cyclists and disabled buggies using the pavement. The Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services indicated that options for cycle paths would be explored as part of Phase 2 of the High Street improvement scheme.

TF 16/7 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.

Whilst there had been a small increase in the number of calls to the Service recently, overall the level of incidents remained low.

Reference was made to the Safety Plan which was due for consultation and set out how the fire service would operate over the next 12 – 18 months. There had been a 25% reduction in funding and, although this was not as bad as initially predicted, savings of £8M still had to be found. It was hoped that these could be achieved by reviewing how appliances and stations were crewed and flexible working. However, it was reported that there would be no station closures.

The Service was also looking at supporting aspects of the public health agenda and was working closely with Public Health England to identify where this assistance could be offered. Some Fire Services were already piloting support regarding medical emergency responses and this area would continue to be explored.

Practical advice on fuel poverty and how to feel safer in the home was given to the public.

Finally, a Road Traffic Collision Centre was due to open in Rochester shortly and interested groups/schools might be able to visit to 'test' the facilities prior to the official opening. The Centre was targeted at young people learning to drive as it promoted road safety.

TF 16/8 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.

It was noted that the Combined Member Grant Scheme 2015/16 was open until 31 March 2016 and that Tonbridge and Malling County Councillors had a total of £175,000 to allocate in 2015/16. Further information on this was available by contacting local County Councillors or the Community Liaison Officer.

A number of public consultations were ongoing and everyone was encouraged to participate. All Kent County Council consultations could be viewed online at:

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

Particular reference was made to the Tonbridge Gateway consultation which ended on 21 February 2016 and invited comments on the proposals to move County Services to the library in the High Street. It was recognised that services were accessed in different ways and that use had changed. These proposals reflected that change.

The Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services advised that whilst the Borough Council understood the County Council's stance regarding the Gateway proposals it would continue to look at potential options for Tonbridge Castle to offset any funding loss and find alternative income. The Borough Council would continue to provide services at the Castle but were unable to predict what these would be like in the longer term.

Finally, the results of the consultation on streetlights were due to be considered by the County's Environment and Transport Committee this week. The conversion to LED meant that streetlights were now more efficient and the central control provided greater flexibility.

TF 16/9 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING SERVICES UPDATE

The Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services provided an update on key points relevant to Tonbridge. The headline messages included:

- Tonbridge Town Lock:

This project represented a significant investment into the town and was on target to finish in March 2016.

TF 16/10 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The Tonbridge Rotary advised that the next Christmas Festival would be held on 27 November 2016 and thanked everyone for their involvement in the last one, which had been a great success. The aspiration was for the Festival to develop into a Christmas market.

The Chairman thanked Tonbridge Rotary for the excellent Christmas Festival which was always well supported.

- Tonbridge Town Team announced that the first Tonbridge Food and Drink Festival would be held from Friday 21 – Sunday 22 May 2016 at Tonbridge Castle and organisations were invited to participate.

The Festival would start on Friday evening with music and street food to be followed by a weekend of food stalls and entertainment on the Castle Lawn. Tonbridge Town Team had worked in partnership with the Market Square Group to organise the event with support from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm