

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 4th December, 2017

Present: Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr C P Smith (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr O C Baldock, Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr V M C Branson, Cllr D J Cure, Cllr Miss G E Thomas, Cllr F G Tombolis.

Together with County Councillors Mr R Long, Mr M Payne and representatives from:

Tonbridge Area Churches Together	Tonbridge Philharmonic Society
Tonbridge Civic Society	Tonbridge Rotary Club
Tonbridge District Scout Council,	Tonbridge Sports Association,
Tonbridge Line Commuters	Tonbridge Town Team
Tonbridge Lions Club	University of the Third Age and
Tonbridge Music Club	Women's Institute

Councillors D Lettington and H S Rogers were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs P A Bates, Kent Police (Tonbridge) and Society of Friends

TF 17/9 CHAIRMANS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman made the following announcements:

- (1) Tribute was paid to Mr Mike Bull OBE who had sadly passed away in November and whose Thanksgiving Service was held earlier in the day. Mr Bull had been a regular attendee and contributor at the Tonbridge Forum and represented both St Johns Ambulance and the Baptist Church.
- (2) The current Chairman of Tonbridge Angels Football Club (Mr Steve Churcher) had announced his retirement from the role that he actively fulfilled for the last eight years.
- (3) Tonbridge Rotary and Tonbridge Lions were congratulated on an excellent Christmas Lights Switch On. The event held over the recent weekend had attracted a large number of people who had participated in various activities.
- (4) Tonbridge Art Group was celebrating its 50th Anniversary and the Forum noted the organisation's contribution to the town.
- (5) Reference was made to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review undertaken in 2015/16, in consultation with local community

groups and organisations, regarding the format, membership and frequency of the Tonbridge Forum. It was noted that the layout of the evening's meeting had been changed on an experimental basis, and any feedback to Officers would be welcomed. Members were advised that a further consultation into the format, membership and frequency of the meetings would be undertaken by Officers in due course and proposals reported to a future meeting.

TF 17/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF 17/11 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

The Chairman referred to Minute Number TF 17/7 (Kent County Council Services Update) and asked whether the street lights along the foot/cycle path from the Weir to the entrance of the Memorial Gardens had been reinstated or whether this required further action.

In response, the Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services was pleased to report that these lights had been reinstated as part of improvement works undertaken by the Borough Council.

TF 17/12 REGENERATION AND INVESTMENT IN TONBRIDGE AND PLANNING UPDATE

The Economic Regeneration Officer, the Head of Leisure and the Planning Policy Manager provided an overview of the regeneration and investment activity in Tonbridge over recent years; advised of upcoming initiatives and updated on progress on the emerging Local Plan.

Projects delivered recently to improve the appearance of the town and transport access included work and investment on the High Street, the Memorial Gardens, Town Lock, River Walk and Haysden Country Park. An expanded range of uses and promotion of mixed use development had seen new investment in leisure facilities, greater choice of food and drink outlets and new retail opportunities provided at Cannon Lane. In addition, a number of events and activities, including the Tonbridge Food and Drink Festival, contributed to the overall character of the town. It was reported that by encouraging sufficient footfall into Tonbridge the business and economic regeneration of the town continued to be supported.

Future investment opportunities included improvements at Tonbridge station, increasing capacity of the Leigh Flood Storage Area to protect homes and business and an ongoing review of the Borough Council's property assets. It was noted that the sale of the Teen and Twenty site had enabled the potential provision of a first class medical facility for the

town. Services previously provided at this site had been successfully moved to the Tonbridge Youth Hub.

With regard to the Local Plan, the first major public consultation had concluded in November 2016 with 1,117 responses and 2,482 representations received. Members of the Borough Council's Planning and Transportation Advisory Board had received regular updates on the detail and progress of the Local Plan.

Particular reference was made to recent Government proposals to introduce a standard methodology for estimating future housing needs in Spring 2018. Unfortunately, these proposals could have adverse implications on the Borough Councils' Local Plan programme.

As a result of this new methodology the housing need for Tonbridge and Malling increased by 163 new homes a year. Over the 20 year plan this equated to an additional 2,360 homes and represented a significant challenge.

The Borough Council would continue to prepare the Local Plan, update any evidence as necessary and look at options for meeting the anticipated housing need. Due to the Government proposals it was expected that public consultation on a draft Plan would be later than originally planned and was likely to be late summer 2018.

In response to a question related to the percentage of housing delivered in Tonbridge it was indicated that this represented approximately 25% of that built throughout Tonbridge and Malling.

A number of organisations, including the Civic Society and Women's Institute, expressed concern about the provision for older persons within the town and felt it was important to reflect the needs of this demographic appropriately. In addition to improving the provision of care homes there was a need to provide smaller accommodation so that people could continue to live independently and downsize.

Particular reference was made to the reduced number of public toilets in the town and the Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services indicated that general provision of these would be reviewed in due course. One option being explored was for local traders to sign up to a 'community toilet' scheme. Participating businesses would publicise their toilets for public use, which it was hoped would remove the embarrassment some older persons felt when asking to use the facilities.

Members of the Forum asked Kent County Council to consider the following points in relation to Cannon Lane:

- Review traffic movements and consider what traffic control options could be implemented for the safety of pedestrians;

- Improve pedestrian crossings as the introduction of the new retail units had increased footfall to the site;
- Look at opportunities to improve cycling facilities or providing separate cycle lanes

The Women's Institute suggested that two hours free parking could attract extra visitors to the town. In response, the Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services reminded Members that there was free evening and Sunday parking in Tonbridge. Charges for car parking were also noted as being about managing parking and traffic movement.

Finally, the Tonbridge Town Team commented that events were a good way to encourage visitors to the town and announced that within the town centre it would be organising an English Civil War re-enactment in May 2018. It was hoped that activities of this type would help support the various businesses in the town.

TF 17/13 WASTE SERVICES CONTRACT

The Street Scene Manager outlined proposals for the Waste Services Contract for refuse, recycling and street cleansing as the current contract was due to end in February 2019.

Partnership opportunities for the future delivery of these services were currently being developed with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Dartford Borough Council and Kent County Council, although the final details were still to be defined and agreed. However, the main aim was to deliver service improvements and efficiencies, greater consistency across the County, increased recycling performance and financial savings to the Borough Council.

The current proposals being considered included a weekly food waste, fortnightly residual waste, fortnightly dry recycling of paper and card and glass, cans, plastics and cartons kerbside collection model. Proposals also included the introduction of a fortnightly garden waste 'opt in' charged service. It was reported that charges were necessary in underpinning the proposed service improvements.

It was indicated that Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council was in the minority of local authorities across Kent that did not currently charge for the collection of garden waste.

Details relating to some services and the introduction of charges for garden waste were yet to be finalised by the Borough Council as some decisions were dependent upon the outcome of the tendering exercise. However, it was noted that the national average charge for garden waste collection was approximately £42 per annum.

Early engagement with potential contractors had been undertaken prior to the commencement of the formal tender process to gauge level of interest. Approximately, 8 expressions of interest had been received.

With regard to recycling rates, the Borough Council had set a realistic and achievable target of 50% which was in line with that achieved by other local authorities in Kent.

It was reiterated that the improved service would be more expensive and the introduction of charging for green waste would help support the enhancements. As part of the tender and contract renewal process an Equality Impact Assessment would be undertaken and any areas of concern, such as discrimination against elderly residents who did not drive, would be identified. However, the Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Environment Services commented that kerbside collections would be beneficial for all residents and particularly those who could not drive to recycling bring sites.

In addition, it was noted that if a contractor offered an option to collect batteries as part of their tender submission the Borough Council would give this full consideration.

Finally, it was noted that good communication, publicity and marketing would be key to resident participation and the success of the new services. The service delivery options around the Waste Services Contract continued and a further update report presented to the Forum.

TF 17/14 UPDATE ON TONBRIDGE STATION IMPROVEMENTS AND HIGH STREET REVIEW

The Senior Schemes Programme Manager at Kent County Council (Mr Jamie Watson) provided an update on the progress being made on the Tonbridge Station improvements and advised that a review of the recent High Street improvements would be undertaken.

It was reported that funding of £500,000 allocated from the West Kent Local Growth Fund to support this project had to be spent during 2018/19. The aim was to improve interaction between users at the station, provide more space for pedestrian movements and to create an interchange suitable for one of the busiest stations outside London.

Key proposals included relocating the bus lane to allow a wider pedestrian space; a 3 meter wide pedestrian crossing from the station towards Priory Road; 3 way traffic light controls (Waterloo Road, B2260 North and South) to allow safer movement for pedestrians, particularly at peak times; and the existing bus layby outside Lidl to be removed and converted to a new pedestrian area. There were also plans for new bus stops for three buses to be created using some of the existing carriageway space.

Consultation on these proposals for the station would start in January 2018 and finish in March 2018.

In setting out these proposals Mr Watson advised that vehicles would be able to pass buses in both directions along the High Street and a right hand turn would be provided. Local bus operators had confirmed satisfaction with these measures.

A number of points had been raised by residents and included the bus stop outside Café Nero causing traffic delays and the raised table in the High Street being mistaken for a pedestrian crossing. It was reported that a review into the High Street improvements was due to be undertaken in January 2018 and these issues could be revisited as part of this exercise.

Areas of concern raised by the Forum related to the proposed locations for the 'kiss and drop' layby, which was felt to be too distant from the station, the need for disabled parking bays at the station, the raised table in the High Street, the shop fronts at the station and whether bus operators could be encouraged to review their service routes.

In response, Mr Watson explained that:

- The raised table in the High Street was a traffic calming feature intended to encourage drivers to consider their environment. It was confirmed that motorists had priority over pedestrians.
- The shop fronts at the station were not currently part of discussions with Network Rail but could be incorporated.
- Disabled parking bays would be provided by South Eastern at the rear of the station. Details related to these bays would be shared once finalised.
- Bus services and routes could be looked at as part of the High Street review.

Members felt strongly that the current 'kiss and drop' should be retained outside the station as the proposed relocation of the layby to Priory Road was too far and not convenient for travellers. In addition, Members encouraged consideration to be given to improving and supporting taxis.

However, Members also recognised and appreciated that the High Street had been greatly improved and all were encouraged to participate in the consultation.

TF 17/15 TONBRIDGE MUSIC CLUB - RECENT ACTIVITIES

Tonbridge Music Club (Mrs Rena Pope) advised the Forum that the organisation had been founded in 1963. Since that time many excellent and influential international musicians had been welcomed to the town, including 'The Sixteen choir, the pianist Alfred Brendel, the Aeolian Quartet and many others.

The Club hosted six professional concerts a year for residents and visitors to enjoy. In addition, the Club were proud to encourage new talent and hosted a regular series of concerts, named after a former president Clifford Benson, featuring young musicians at the beginning of their music career.

Members were advised that a young bassoon artist, Amy Harman, would be performing on 13 January 2018 and all were invited to attend. The concert would start at 1930 hours in the Parish Church.

Mrs Pope observed that 'the past of Tonbridge Music Club had been marvellous, the present superb and the artists as usual excellent'. However, 'smaller audiences for chamber music and fewer members were making it difficult for Music Clubs to continue'.

Current membership was 150 compared to 350 in 2003 and long serving Members, such as the Treasurer and Secretary, were standing down from their roles. Repeated appeals for new membership had not resulted in people to take on these positions and the Forum was asked to promote not only the concerts but the Music Club. The Chairman, in his capacity as Leader, suggested that the Borough Council's Media and Communications Team could assist with promotion and organisation of a social media campaign.

Tonbridge Town Team referred to the Tonbridge Arts Festival which had covered music, art, literature and theatre and dance and advised that this could be extended to include activities from other organisations. The Town Team were happy to help and support other local community groups.

TF 17/16 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Due to other work commitments Kent Police had submitted their apologies for this meeting.

TF 17/17 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, as a supplement, to the agenda for information.

Particular reference was made to a number of key messages and these included:

- The points made by the Leader of the County Council advising of continuing budget pressures, focusing on the Council's Autumn Statement.
- The Member Grant Scheme 2017/18 was now opened with £22,000 available to fund both community and highway projects. Tonbridge and Malling County Councillors had a total of £154,000 to allocate in 2017/18. Projects previously supported included the 2018 English Civil War re-enactment and the Tonbridge Christmas Festival. Local County Councillors were also considering road crossing improvements and highway schemes.

Further information was available from local County Councillors or the Community Liaison Officer

Recent consultations included the Draft Budget Strategy 2018/19 and the Community Infant Feeding Support, both of which had ended on 3 December 2017. A consultation related to Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Allocations, setting out proposals related to the introduction of service charges, deposit scheme and changes to the application process, had a deadline for responses of 20 December 2017. In addition, the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment consultation sought views from health and social care professionals, organisations and local communities on the level of pharmacy services. The deadline for responses was 22 January 2018.

A consultation on Socially Necessary Bus Service funding was due to be launched in January. This would assess the future level of subsidy and the timetable alongside possible withdrawals of subsidies which had the potential to impact on the delivery of some bus services.

All Kent County Council consultations could be viewed online at:

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

Local Members expressed concern regarding on-street parking in the centre of Tonbridge for residential properties and asked that the County Council stand by their guidance of 1 parking space for each individual flat/property. County Councillor R Long advised that Kent County Council were fully aware of the concerns raised regarding parking provision in town centres.

Finally, the Tonbridge Town Team referred to air pollution and the impact 'living walls' were having in improving air quality. Kent County Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council were invited to attend a symposium discussing a number of air quality issues early next year. Details would be shared nearer the event date.

TF 17/18 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING SERVICES UPDATE

The headline messages of relevance to Tonbridge and Malling had been covered in depth earlier in the meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm