

## TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 16th April, 2018

**Present:** Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr C P Smith (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr O C Baldock, Cllr Mrs P A Bates, Cllr P F Bolt, Cllr V M C Branson and Cllr F G Tombolis.

Together with County Councillor Mr M Payne and representatives from:

Society of Friends	Tonbridge Rotary Club
Tonbridge Art Group	Tonbridge Sports Association
Tonbridge Civic Society	Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club
Tonbridge Line Commuters	Tonbridge Town Team
Tonbridge Lions Club	University of the Third Age and
Tonbridge Music Club	Women's Institute

Councillor H S Rogers were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D J Cure, Mrs M F Heslop, R D Lancaster, M R Rhodes, Miss G E Thomas, Mr R Long, The Bridge Trust, Kent Police (Tonbridge) and Tonbridge District Scout Council

#### **TF 18/1 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **TF 18/2 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES**

The following updates were provided:

##### **TF 17/9 (5) Chairman Announcements**

The Chairman advised that positive feedback had been received regarding the new round table format trialled at the last meeting. However, further feedback was requested on the frequency and number of meetings and responses were invited by the end of May. A further update would be given at the next meeting of the Tonbridge Forum.

##### **TF 17/15 Tonbridge Music Club – Recent Activities**

Tonbridge Music Club (Mrs Rena Pope) was pleased to report that since the last meeting of the Forum the future of the organisation was more secure as a new Committee Membership had been successfully

established. A number of musical events were planned for the coming year and arrangements were already in hand for Christmas 2018.

**TF 18/3 QUESTION FROM THE LOCAL MEMBER FOR TRENCH WARD**

In advance of the meeting Councillor Georgina Thomas had requested an update regarding the cycle path/access near the Slade School. Unfortunately due to other commitments Councillor Thomas was unable to attend the meeting to provide greater detail around the original question.

A response from Kent County Council would be progressed out of meeting and Forum Members would be advised accordingly.

**TF 18/4 UPDATE ON TONBRIDGE STATION IMPROVEMENTS AND HIGH STREET REVIEW**

The Senior Schemes Manager (Jamie Watson) summarised the progress on the improvements to Tonbridge Station. It was reported that significant work was being undertaken on a detailed design and this would be shared with Members and the public once finalised.

Particular reference was made to Southeastern's proposed cycle hub on Barden Road. This had resulted in design work being required on the junction with Vale roundabout. In addition, separate works were necessary to ensure that cyclists remained safe while accessing the hub and a contraflow cycle lane was proposed.

There were also plans to try and retain the kiss and drop layby outside the station, remove the right hand turn into Priory Road and provide a traffic signalled junction at Waterloo Road granting pedestrian access.

To minimise disruption to traffic it was intended to commence construction at the start of the summer holidays 2018. However, a final programme/timetable for the works had not yet been established.

With regard to the recent review of the High Street it was noted that the on-line public consultation had ended on 4 March 2018. Members were reminded that the aim of the scheme was to provide a more attractive environment for pedestrians, reduce congestion and encourage business to the town.

Unfortunately, the public responses to the consultation illustrated negative feedback towards the project and particular concerns had been expressed regarding online bus stops, the location of bus stops and their use by 'idling' buses.

Overall, there had been a variety of responses but the overwhelming view was that bus stops represented a significant challenge. In response, Kent County Council would continue to explore ways to

improve traffic flows in the town and whether there was the potential to convert the loading bay/layby into a bus stop.

Tonbridge Civic Society commented on the improved appearance of the High Street and thanked Kent County Council for the significant investment into the Town. However, they asked that consideration be given to the structure of bus stops, potential improvements to the unattractive buildings, granite steps and cobbles alongside the station.

It was noted that these buildings were owned by Network Rail and regular lobbying was undertaken by the Chairman and the Borough Council to encourage improvements to the area.

A number of points were raised by the Forum related to improved signage to divert traffic along the Bordyke and away from the High Street, the raised table in the High Street being repeatedly mistaken for a pedestrian crossing, the impact on cyclists of online bus stops and the traffic delays caused by online bus stops.

In response, Mr Watson explained that:

- The aim of the scheme was to encourage traffic away from the High Street and the County Council would review the signage again.
- The raised table in the High Street was a traffic calming feature intended to encourage drivers to consider their environment.
- Whilst the need to improve cycle facilities was recognised the current configuration of the High Street meant it might not be possible to retain all lay-bys.
- The use of appropriate materials would be considered carefully to provide an attractive environment and ensure longevity.
- Bus operators had responsibility to ensure that their timetable did not create 'idling' issues and there was ongoing engagement with service providers to resolve this issue.

Finally, it was reiterated that the County Council would give further consideration to maintaining the free flow of traffic through the town and explore options around the online bus stops. A further update would be given at the next meeting of the Forum in September.

## **TF 18/5 TONBRIDGE FAIRTRADE TOWN**

Tonbridge Town Team (Howard Porter) and the Economic Regeneration Officer (Jeremy Whittaker) set out proposals aimed at making Tonbridge a Fairtrade town.

The benefits of becoming a Fairtrade town were outlined and included:

- A positive contribution towards sustainable development
- Positive benefit to the local community
- Increased engagement with some larger retailers
- Promotional opportunities for Tonbridge

Initial interest to the proposals had been expressed from retailers and community groups between November 2017 and January 2018, with a resolution to support Fairtrade Tonbridge passed by the Borough Council in February 2018.

Promotional activities had been undertaken during Fairtrade Fortnight in February/March 2018 and Fairtrade produce had been introduced at the monthly Tonbridge Farmers Market in March.

A number of next steps to be undertaken were set out and included:

- Continuing to work through the application process
- Encouraging more local businesses and community organisations to get involved

It was reported that a Steering Group would convene for the first time later this month (April 2018) and Borough Councillor Frixos Tombolis had agreed to act as Chairman. A final application would be submitted in 2018.

Members fully supported the proposal especially as there was evidence that Fairtrade initiatives increased tourism, motivated staff and was a brand that was easily recognised and trusted by the public. It was also suggested that consideration be given to supporting 'Direct Trade' which was often viewed as complementary to Fairtrade certification.

In response, it was explained that once Fairtrade certification was achieved there was no reason why 'Direct Trade' could not form part of this initiative.

The community aspect of the initiative and the need to involve local workplaces and organisations was emphasised. Volunteers willing to participate were asked to contact Tonbridge Town Team for more information.

#### **TF 18/6 KENT POLICE UPDATE**

This item was WITHDRAWN from the agenda as Kent Police were unable attend for operational reasons.

**TF 18/7 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 to the agenda for information.

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

- Many Council meetings were broadcast live and provided residents with the opportunity to watch how decisions were made. Meetings from the past year were available to view online at the Kent County Council website.
- The Guide to Apprenticeships and Made in Kent campaigns offered careers advice, information about different types of jobs and continued to encourage employers to register vacancies as numbers of young people registering for apprenticeships were exceeding placements.
- The deadline for applying to the Kent and Medway Business Fund, which offered zero % loans between £50,000 and £500,000 to small and medium sized businesses was 30 April 2018.
- The Combined Member Grant Scheme 2018/19 had opened on 1 April with £20,000 available to every County Councillor to fund both community and highway projects in their electoral division. Anyone interested should contact either County Councillors Michael Payne or Richard Long, although it was noted that requests for and pressures on funding were already significant.
- Everyone was encouraged to register to the Kent Public Health Observatory which provided information on public health based on data collection, analysis and interpretation.
- More than 97% of children across Kent had been allocated one of their chosen primary schools, with 97% getting their first preference. As a result, only 3% of families would be allocated a school they did not name.

Finally, all Kent County Council consultations could be viewed online at:

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

Kent County Councillor Payne also reported on the refurbishment of Tonbridge library, the opening of the Nexus School in Upper Haysden Lane, reiterated the pressures on the recently opened Combined

Member Grant fund and encouraged everyone to use the online fault reporting tool for any problems on the roads and footways.

## **TF 18/8 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE**

The Chairman (in his role as Leader of the Borough Council) provided an update on key points relevant to Tonbridge. The headline messages set out in the presentation would be available online and circulated with the Minutes. However, in summary these included:

- Keep Kent Clean and litter picks: A significant number of events had taken place in Tonbridge during March and April and all volunteers who had participated were thanked.
- Street Monitors and Flood Wardens would join forces for a big rubbish clearance at Sovereign Way Car Park on 12 May.
- Plans were in place to recruit a One You 'your home' advisor to be based at Warders Medical Centre.
- Tonbridge Area Churches were running litter picking events for young people over the 6 week summer holiday.
- External funding had been secured from developer contributions and there had been investment and improvements made to a number of facilities including Haysden Country Park, Tonbridge Racecourse Sportsground, Remembrance Gardens cycle way and Tonbridge Town Lock.
- Full time pay and display parking had been introduced around Tonbridge Castle Grounds car park to meet ongoing demand for public parking.
- Tonbridge Swimming Pool had received an industry standard QUEST award and was one of only 12 facilities who had received this rating. It was noted that both the Swimming Pool and Larkfield Leisure Centre had achieved this outstanding result and were in the top 2% nationally.
- The Borough Council had adopted a scheme in 2017 to pass on support to local businesses affected by the revaluation of business rates.
- The Borough Council was working in partnership to create a business hub for small and start-up businesses at the Castle Lodge and business engagement events had been established to help support local businesses.

- Support had been given to Tonbridge Creates to deliver a pop up shop on Tonbridge High Street at Angel Walk.

In response to a query regarding the introduction of car parking charges around Tonbridge Castle, the Chief Executive explained that these changes were to maximise the spaces available for public parking provision. The visitor spaces for those using the Castle offices were being retained.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm