

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 24th February, 2020

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:

- Kent Police (Tonbridge),
- Society of Friends,
- Tonbridge and Malling Seniors,
- Tonbridge Art Group,
- Tonbridge Civic Society,
- Tonbridge District Scout Council,
- Tonbridge Historical Society,
- Tonbridge Lions Club,
- Tonbridge Rotary Club,
- Tonbridge Sports Association,
- Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club,
- Tonbridge Town Team,
- University of the Third Age and
- Women's Institute

Councillors R P Betts, M A J Hood, D Lettington and H S Rogers were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor F G Tombolis and Tonbridge Music Club.

TF 20/1 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TF 20/2 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

The Chairman provided an update on the following item:

TF 19/20 – Gas Replacement Works in Tonbridge

SGN had indicated that the replacement of the main gas pipe at one end of the High Street (opposite Tonbridge School) would be scheduled for July/August this year. However, the actual dates had not been finalised as there was ongoing discussion with Kent Highway Services on

measures to mitigate traffic concerns. The most appropriate diversion routes were also being considered.

Particular reference was made to the recent improvement works on the A21. The road had recently reopened following 10 days of works and good progress had been made in difficult weather conditions. It was noted that there was some outstanding work to be undertaken on the south bound Medway viaduct and Kent Highway Services would consult with appropriate organisations on the best time to schedule this work. Other work completed during the road closure included the collection of litter, trimming of trees and hedges, drainage clearance and repairs to safety barriers and fences.

TF 20/3 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING UPDATE - LEADER OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL

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 on line and circulated with the Minutes.

Particular reference was made to the Waste Services Contract and the Chairman advised that the Borough Council recognised that the poor performance related to the new service arrangements were unacceptable and acknowledged that the last few months had been extremely difficult and frustrating. In response to the poor performance the Borough Council had escalated contract issues with Urbaser and the Chief Executive wrote personally to the Managing Director. As a result of formal meetings at the highest level the contractor had provided a detailed action plan to address and resolve the performance issues.

A number of measures had been implemented to ensure that all residents received an acceptable level of service and progress on the action plan was monitored weekly. Since the implementation of the new measures contract performance had improved significantly and there had been a reduction in the volume of complaints received.

Despite the issues with the contract there had been very positive engagement from residents regarding recycling. It was reported that early indications for October/November 2019 showed an improved recycling collection rate of 50% which was extremely encouraging.

The Chairman reiterated disappointment and frustration at the poor performance of the contractor during January. However, he was pleased to see an improving position and thanked residents for their patience, particularly the positive approach to recycling.

Information was also provided on a number of other areas as summarised below:

- The Borough Council had adopted a motion to recognise climate change in July 2019 and aspired to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- The Local Plan hearings had been scheduled for 18 – 21 May 2020 and would be held at the East Malling Research Centre.
- The budget and Council Tax rate for 2020/21 had been agreed by Council on 18 February. An increase of £5 (2.4%) on the Borough Council's element of the council tax had been supported. It was explained that Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council retained only a small percentage of the overall council tax bill (11.2%).
- The services supported/funded by the Special Expenses element of the Council Tax were outlined and included allocations towards sports grounds, parks, play areas and open spaces, local events and closed churchyards and allotments. It was noted that outside Tonbridge these services would be delivered by parish councils.
- Future investment included protection of the river bank at the Racecourse Sports Ground, improvements to Haysden Country Park and the Shopfront Improvement Scheme would be extended to local centres and parades in Tonbridge, such as Martin Hardie Way and York Parade.
- A new and improved 'big bridge' had now opened and had anti-slip, timber decking.
- Following the announcement that Beales had gone into administration it would be the responsibility of Sainsbury, as site owner, to fill the vacant premises.
- Discussions were ongoing regarding the appearance of Railway Approach and proposals to support regeneration of the area were expected from the owners in due course.
- Remediation work was ongoing at the Colas site on the Tonbridge Trade Park and it was anticipated that a planning application would be submitted in due course.
- There would be a public consultation on the proposals for the Poundland site on the High Street and this would start on 6 March at Tonbridge Castle.

In response to a question regarding the Fidelity site, the Chairman indicated that this had been purchased by Berkley Homes although there was no further information at the current time. However, Tonbridge and Malling was the Local Planning Authority and would consider a planning application if one was submitted.

TF 20/4 WEST KENT AND HADLOW COLLEGES

The Vice Principal Curriculum of the West Kent Area College (Dr Jim Mawby) and the representative of Hadlow College (Dr Lindsay Pamphilon) attended the meeting to address concerns about the future of further education provision at the Hadlow Group of colleges.

Hadlow and West Kent and Ashford colleges had been placed into education administration in May and August 2019 respectively. It was explained that this was a process specifically for further education bodies. The objective was to avoid or minimise disruption to the studies of the existing students of the college. This differed from a 'normal' administration where the primary duty of the Administrators was to act in the interests of creditors.

As a result of the education administration, the Further Education Commission had made a number of recommendations for the future operation of the colleges. It was proposed that the East Kent College Group take on West Kent and Ashford College's provision/facilities in Ashford and that North Kent College should take on West Kent and Ashford College's provision/facilities in Tonbridge. These measures were to be implemented by 31 March 2020.

Members and students were assured that the colleges continued to operate as normal and enrolment numbers continued to increase. In fact, the colleges were reported as making reasonable progress in all areas following a recent visit from Ofsted.

In response to a question from the Forum, it was confirmed that the Hadlow Rural Community School was not involved in this process and would remain on site as a separate entity.

Members welcomed the news that further education would continue in Hadlow and Tonbridge and were pleased that enrolment remained steady. However, students raised concerns about the lack of communication and expressed concern about future funding and staffing. The Vice-Principal committed to meeting with students to discuss their concerns in more detail.

TF 20/5 CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

Reference was made to the motion adopted by Full Council in July 2019 which set out the 'aspiration for Tonbridge and Malling to be carbon neutral by 2030' and for a strategy to be developed to support this ambition.

The progress being made on the development of a Climate Change Strategy was outlined and a draft strategy had been reviewed by the [Street Scene and Environment Services Advisory Board](#) on 11 February. This had set out the Borough Council's commitment to local action on

climate change, biodiversity protection and enhancement and an approach to partnership working and included references to electric vehicle charging points, a Tree Charter and waste and recycling targets.

The Borough Council recognised the need to work with statutory partners, local businesses, local community groups and individuals to raise awareness and help to influence change. The Draft Climate Change Strategy and Draft Action Plan would be available on the Borough Council website for public consultation from 2 March to 1 May 2020.

Responses received would be presented to a future meeting of the Street Scene and Environment Services Advisory Board and could influence the shape of the Climate Change Strategy and associated actions. All Members of the Forum were encouraged to submit comments and were asked to promote the consultation so that a wider audience could be reached.

The Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Environment Services (Councillor Robin Betts) indicated that the Strategy was an evolving document and would be able to take advantage of any forthcoming technological advances. In addition, the Borough Council would seek advice and guidance on climate change strategies from external consultants. Kent County Council had recommended LASER a procurement and management company with 30 years' experience in assisting public bodies identify solutions to cut emissions through energy efficiency and advising on renewable energy methods.

Finally, Tonbridge District Scout Council advised of a recent initiative where scouts had planted 800 trees to aid climate change.

TF 20/6 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Sergeant Turtle provided a verbal update on the achievements made in performance and the neighbourhood policing agenda.

It was reported that a suspect had been identified for the recent burglaries from dwellings in North Tonbridge. Kent Police had also arrested the offender who had broken into a North Tonbridge pharmacy and stolen prescription drugs. The individual had been remanded to prison for sentencing.

Recent operations, incidents and trends included:

- Ongoing nuisance cycling and anti-social behaviour linked to national 'ride-outs'. Local officers continued to engage with youths and this was a key priority for the Community Safety Unit. Members were pleased to note that PC Ballard had received an award for her work with the community.

- York Parade in Tonbridge had suffered anti-social behaviour and low level crime over the last month. There had been increased police visibility and offenders had been dealt with and ring leaders identified.
- A report of a planned fight in Tonbridge for 17 January had been received and officers attended several schools and spoke with students offering advice and outlining potential consequences. This intervention had prevented the fight taking place.
- Community Policing Teams had visited a car wash facility on Vale Road, Tonbridge after a report of modern day slavery had been received. Fortunately, there was no evidence of any illegal activity although some minor health and safety issues had been identified.
- Issues with anti-social behaviour in Audley Avenue, Tonbridge had been reported and the Community Safety Partnership were liaising with Clarion Housing.
- Operation Skunk had taken place in and around Tonbridge Station on Friday 21 February. There had been 18 stop and searches for drugs; a small number of penalty notices issued and a variety of motoring offences dealt with.

Particular reference was made to the Kent Police website and the ['What's Happening in Your Area'](#) which enabled residents to get the latest crime statistics for their area by entering a postcode or address. Residents could also assist with appeals for information, find out what was being done to tackle crime in their local areas and report issues.

Finally, in response to a question, it was confirmed that a new Police Community Support Officer had been appointed to cover Castle Ward.

Residents thanked Kent Police for their increased visibility in Judd Ward over recent months and hoped that the offer of a roving camera to monitor and capture information would happen. However, concerns were expressed that police visibility would not be maintained in the area. It was also hoped that Clarion Housing would take measures to address anti-social behaviour of their tenants. Sergeant Turtle assured the Forum that the Community Policing Team would continue to respond to incidents.

A request for an increased level of street lighting to improve visibility in the area and deter anti-social behaviour was noted by County Councillors Long and Payne as this was a Kent County Council responsibility.

TF 20/7 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE

The County Councillors for Tonbridge (Michael Payne and Richard Long) provided details of a number of County initiatives and consultations. The headline messages of relevance to Tonbridge included:

- Additional funding to deal with highway maintenance such as repairing footways, pot holes and drainage.
- 120,000 street lights had been converted to LED which had saved approximately £6M and also reduced carbon emissions.
- Positive feedback had been received regarding the work at Tonbridge Library, which had been upgraded to a tier 1 facility.

A number of issues were raised by the Forum related to the asset management of the highways network, especially in bad weather, and the latest position regarding the short link road between the Slade to Lansdowne Road to relieve traffic around the Castle.

With regard to the former, it was indicated that surface water should be addressed by landowners and many issues could be mitigated by land conditioning and agricultural processes. It was the landowner's responsibility to maintain their own drainage.

The Chairman asked that the link road question be forwarded to the Borough Council's Technical Services for a response.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm