

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

TUNBRIDGE WELLS JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD

MINUTES of the meeting held at the Virtual Meeting - Online, at 6.00 pm on Monday, 30 January 2023

PRESENT: Borough Councillors Brice, Roberts, Allen and Lewis
County Councillors Hamilton (Vice-Chair), Barrington-King, McInroy and Oakford
Parish Councillor Mackonochie

Officers in Attendance: Hilary Smith (TWBC Economic Development Manager), John Strachan (TWBC Parking Manager), Jamie Watson (KCC Active Travel Manager), Julian Cook (KCC District Highways Manager) and Louise Kellam (TWBC Democratic Services Officer)

APOLOGIES

TB13/22 Apologies were received from Councillors Lidstone and Willis.
County Councillors Bruneau and Holden were not present at the meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

TB14/22 There were no disclosable pecuniary interests or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS REGISTERED TO SPEAK

TB15/22 Councillor Dave Funnell and Mrs Angela Funnell were registered to speak on Item 5 – Update on Bus Services. Mrs Jane Fenwick and Mr John Coupe were registered to speak on Item 6 – Active Travel Update and Councillor Marguerita Moreton was registered for Item 7 – Highway Works Programme.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 3 OCTOBER 2022

TB16/22 Members reviewed the minutes. No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting dated 3 October 2022 be approved as a correct record.

UPDATE ON BUS SERVICES

TB17/22 Registered Speakers – Angela Funnell and Dave Funnell

There were no officers from KCC available to present the report.

Chairman Cllr Hamilton invited TWBC Economic Development Manager Hilary Smith to make a comment. Cllr Hamilton also stressed that KCC did not cut bus services as this was a commercial decision made by bus companies, which was often misunderstood.

Hilary Smith explained that while the report provided in the agenda set out a lot of information, she wished to highlight that bus operators were facing very

challenging circumstances with rising costs of fuel and staffing and falling numbers of passengers. TWBC and the KCC public transport team had worked locally with bus operators to support and try to make improvements to bus services and would continue to do so. The Chairman then expressed her thanks to Hilary and her team, as well as the KCC officers, for all the work they had done on this important issue.

Discussion and questions from Members included:

- The registered speakers were thanked for their comments with Members sharing their frustrations at loss of services, especially in more rural areas.
- It was a case of 'use it or lose it' for bus services and creative thinking was needed to encourage people to use services and make it more cost-efficient, otherwise there was a risk of rural isolation, especially for older populations.
- The KCC budget for the next financial year included £4 million to subsidise commercial bus routes in order to keep as many bus routes running as possible.
- It was a conundrum that needed to be solved as it was felt to be the same people being left behind by bus services as with the move to electronic services, bank closures etc.
- People without the means for a car or taxi were being disenfranchised by a lack of bus services. It was noted that Go Coach in Sevenoaks provided a minibus service which was more demand-led than across a particular route, which Southborough Town Council had looked at to provide a service between Southborough and High Brooms.
- Buses were a way of getting people off the road and out of their cars which could reduce fossil fuel usage and carbon output, especially considering the climate emergency, as well as stopping the decline of the night-time economy of Tunbridge Wells for those who wanted to drink while out.
- A proposal was made for a JTB think-tank with people from KCC, bus services and Parishes to work on grass-roots solutions, but this was deemed to be the work of the Local Focus Group, which was KCC and TWBC officers working with bus operators and was part of the new structure of meetings following the preparation of bus service improvement plans and could be expanded to include Councillors.

ACTIVE TRAVEL UPDATE

TB18/22 Registered Speakers – Jane Fenwick and John Coupe

Jamie Watson, KCC Active Travel Manager, presented the report as set out in the agenda.

Questions and discussion from Members included:

- Registered speaker John Coupe's contribution was deemed an eloquent summary, highlighting the resilience and speed of cycling as well as public safety issues.
- When asked if, out of the 3 schemes progressing for Tunbridge Wells, the Cross Town route via the Common (Langton Green/Rusthall to Tunbridge Wells) could be prioritised due to the likelihood to succeed and its usefulness to local residents as the last bus route between Langton Green/Rusthall and the town centre was at 7pm, Jamie Watson stated that the initial priorities had been provided by TWBC but suggested that while all 3 schemes were still in the sifting process

there was potential for reprioritisation. Economic Development Manager Hilary Smith also mentioned that money from the KCC Capability Fund was available to start looking at designs for the cycle route.

- While the recent update to the Highway Code recognised cyclists within the road network and created a much better situation for them on the roads, the safest form of cycling was still via dedicated cycle paths. These paths and routes needed joining up, but this was expensive. The Pembury Road cycle path was a good example due to its use by a large number of school pupils without risks of driveways or cars, but the traffic lights and increasing congestion on Pembury Road created future hazards.

HIGHWAY WORKS PROGRAMME

TB19/22 Registered Speaker – Paul Mason had technical difficulties and was unable to speak at the meeting, but was offered the opportunity to ask any questions of Officers directly at another time.

Julian Cook, KCC Highway Manager for Tunbridge Wells, introduced the report as set out in the agenda.

Questions and discussion from Members included the following:

- Slurry covering/seal, in the context of Upper Grosvenor Road, was clarified as a surface treatment of liquid bitumen coating over footways to smooth the surfaces and remove any irregularities for pedestrians.

TOPICS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

TB20/22 Registered Speaker – Cllr Marguerita Moreton.

Discussion included the following comments:

- In response to Cllr Moreton's speech regarding parking issues in the St. John's area, TWBC Parking Manager John Strachan clarified that the Borough could put resident parking schemes in place where demand was demonstrated but other restrictions, such as a ban on footway parking, were a matter for the County Council. Julian Cook explained that in the first instance these proposals would need to go to KCC's Highway Improvements Team. As a future agenda item it was believed that the information requested was already available on remedies, so would not be suitable.
- Metal posts on footways around the St John's area to stop pavement parking was not deemed appropriate due to the narrow footways, but individual cases were assessed by KCC for suitability and other parking restrictions were used where possible.
- When asked about parking enforcement issues in Southborough, Mr Strachan stated enforcement was ongoing and often used information from Members and residents' reports to send additional enforcement.
- Potholes had become a significant issue following inclement winter weather and initial temporary fillings had been laid in routes that would receive more attention later in the year to provide relief to motorists and reduce damage to vehicles, but these temporary solutions did fail over time. Permanent repairs were now underway and contractors were being used to assist over the next few weeks. Millions of pounds were needed to bring Highway standards up to public expectations, as

numerous news articles had reported. Budget updates were expected shortly, but it was not expected that necessary capital schemes were to be dropped for the maintenance budget.

- Response times to pothole reports varied based on whether it was individual potholes (approx. 28 days) or if the whole road needed resurfacing which may have required a capital bid.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

TB21/22 The next meeting was scheduled for Monday 17th April 2023

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 7.30 pm.