

## Civic Development Petition

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Full Council
<b>Portfolio Holder(s)</b>	Councillor David Jukes – Leader of the Council
<b>Lead Director</b>	Lee Colyer – Director of Finance, Policy and Development
<b>Head of Service</b>	Jane Clarke – Head of Policy and Governance
<b>Lead Officer/Author</b>	Mark O’Callaghan – Democratic Services Officer
<b>Classification</b>	Non-exempt
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

**This report makes the following recommendations to the final decision-maker:**

That the petition be considered and resolved accordingly.

**This report relates to the following Five Year Plan Key Objectives:**

- A Confident Borough

The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that they are one way in which people can let us know their concerns. A healthy democracy builds confidence, trust and satisfaction.

<b>Timetable</b>	
<b><i>Meeting</i></b>	<b><i>Date</i></b>
Council	26 July 2017

# Civic Development Petition

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 A petition has been received. Whilst the petition was conducted outside of the Council's e-petition platform available on its website, the Council has accepted the petition in good faith and agreed to consider it under the terms of its published scheme. The petition was signed by more than 1,000 people and will therefore be discussed at a meeting of Full Council.
  - 1.2 This report sets out the terms of the petition, the procedure for dealing with petitions at Full Council and some background information on the issues raised by the petition.
  - 1.3 Members are asked to debate the issues and determine a response.
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## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### The petition

- 2.1 The petition was hosted on the change.org website and a paper version was distributed by hand in and around Tunbridge Wells town centre. The two versions and different text therefore we will use the online version which had the greatest number of signatures.
- 2.2 The petition states:

"Save Tunbridge Wells from the council's £70m civic complex before it's too late.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council proposes to build a new theatre and council offices in and around Calverley Grounds. The plan will cost £70m+, leave the existing civic complex empty and will spoil a historic park.

The council's plans are ill-conceived and expose the town to huge risks:

- 1) The new development will built in and around Calverley Grounds with considerable potential for overshadowing park users.
- 2) Cost of £2.5m+ pa to service the debt and £500k pa theatre subsidy for an already cash-strapped council - are you prepared to pay increased council tax or cut local services to fund new council offices/theatre?
- 3) Result in the loss of the Great Hall and Mount Pleasant Avenue car parks with 300 spaces for the many years of construction - local businesses have expressed significant concern.

- 4) No parties have signed up to occupy the existing council offices and Assembly Hall, risking a second derelict site in the centre of town.

Please sign this petition to force the council to consider again the alternatives. The council's own consultants put forward a plan that would provide a similar-sized theatre on the current Assembly Hall site. This would deliver all the benefits of the proposed theatre, but at a fraction of the cost (£10m for a complete renovation and £25m for something similar to that proposed for Calverley Grounds). It would also preserve precious car parking in the centre of town, link the theatre with the new cultural hub to create an exciting cultural quarter and remove the risk of creating a second "old cinema site".

Reworking and renovating the existing civic buildings would be far greater value for money than the current proposal with significantly less disruption. Sign this petition to force the council to drop its current plans and save Tunbridge Wells."

- 2.3 A copy of the front sheet of the petition is attached at appendix A. A copy of the paper version is attached at appendix B.
- 2.4 As the online version was available worldwide through change.org we have omitted any signatures of people with an address outside the United Kingdom. We also omitted two signatures of people with an address outside the United Kingdom from the paper version.
- 2.5 At the time the petition was submitted, the online version was electronically signed by 1,746 people and the paper version was signed by 272 people. 2 signatures were discounted as duplicates therefore a total of 2,016 are acknowledged as having validly signed this petition.
- 2.6 To allow elected Members, the petitioners and members of the public to consider the issue in more detail, a short background report summarising the main points is attached at appendix C.

### **Meeting procedure**

- 2.7 The petition organiser(s) have up to 10 minutes to address the Council and set out their argument.
- 2.8 Members of the public who have duly registered may speak on the Petition, under the Public Speaking Rules. A maximum of four people may speak for up to three minutes each. Places are usually allocated on a first come first served basis except that where there are several people with the same view groups may be asked to elect a spokesperson.
- 2.9 A representative of any Town or Parish Councils within the Borough, having duly registered, may give the official view of their Town or Parish. Each representative may speak for up to three minutes. This time is in addition to the time allowed for public speaking.
- 2.10 Following the speakers, the relevant portfolio holder will speak first and propose a motion; the proceedings will then follow the usual rules of debate.
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### 3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider all the issues in determining their response to the petition. The resolution may take various forms but will fall into one of the following broad categories:
- 3.2 **To take the action the petition requests** – The petition is not specific enough to be adopted as a resolution in itself; however, members may determine a resolution that accepts the petition in principle and starts a process of reviewing relevant Council policies.
- 3.3 **To take no action** – Members may disagree with the premise of the petition and resolve to take no further action.
- 3.4 **To commission further work** – Members may agree in full or in part with the petition and determine that further consideration is needed. The matter may be referred to a committee for investigation – possibly the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Council should identify the terms of any referral and specify whether authority for making a decision is delegated or retained. If authority is retained the view of the committee would be reported to Full Council for decision.
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### 4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 This report and its appendices sets out the issues and options to be considered but do not make a recommendation.
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### 5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 The petition organiser will be informed in writing of the decision taken by Full Council. The decision will also be published on the Council's website.
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### 6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 The report is procedural and not subject to consultation.
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### 7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Legal</b> including Human Rights Act	The Council's published Petition Scheme and the Constitution (Council Procedure Rule 9) set out how a petition will be dealt with. This report is in accordance with the scheme.	Estelle Culligan, Interim Head of the Mid Kent Legal Partnership 14 July 2017

<b>Finance</b> and other resources	This report is procedural. There are no specific implications arising from this report. However, it is noted that any proposed actions in response to the petition may have their own implications. If the Council intended to take any such actions the decision would be subject to a separate report.	Mark O'Callaghan, Democratic Services Officer 11 June 2017
<b>Staffing establishment</b>		
<b>Risk management</b>		
<b>Environment</b> and sustainability		
<b>Community safety</b>		
<b>Health and Safety</b>		
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>		
<b>Equalities</b>		

## 8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Front sheet of the online version of the petition
- Appendix B: Front sheet of the paper version of the petition
- Appendix C: Response to the petition

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## 9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Constitution:

<http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/council/councillors-and-meetings/how-the-council-works/council-constitution>

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Petition Scheme:

<http://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/meetings/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD973&ID=973&RPID=377178>