

## **TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL**

MINUTES of a meeting of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, duly convened and held at the Council Chamber, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS, at 6.45 pm on Wednesday, 5 October 2022

### **PRESENT:**

**The Mayor Councillor Godfrey Bland (Chair)**

**Councillors Allen, Atkins, Atwood, Bailey, Barrass, Barrington-King, Brice, Britcher-Allan, Chapelard, Dawlings, Ellis, Everitt, Fairweather, Fitzsimmons, Funnell, Hall, Dr Hall, Hayward, Hill, Holden, Johnson, Knight, Le Page, Lewis, Lidstone, March, McMillan, Moon, Morton, Neville, Ms Palmer, Patterson (Vice-Chair), Poile, Pope, Pound, Roberts, Rogers, Rutland, Sankey, Wakeman, Warne and White**

**IN ATTENDANCE:** William Benson (Chief Executive) and Claudette Valmond (Head of Legal Partnership and Interim Monitoring Officer)

### **IN MEMORIAM JOHN ANTONIADES**

FC31/22 The Council observed a minute silence as a mark of respect following the death of council officer John Antoniadès who had died whilst in service as Estates Manager for the Council.

### **SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING THE PASSING OF HM THE QUEEN**

FC32/22 The Mayor advised that the Council had TWBC had made a number of action in the memory of HM the Queen the council and nation as a while has marked these events through moments reflections and 2 mins silence after the funeral

The Mayor wrote to the King to wish him well

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

FC33/22 Apologies were received from Councillors Goodship, Ms Palmer, Rands, Willis and Hickey

Councillor Johnson was not present

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 6 JULY 2022**

FC34/22 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting dated 6 July were approved as a correct record.

### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

FC35/22 No declarations of pecuniary or significant other interest were made.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

FC36/22 The Mayor made the following announcements:

The Mayor talked about his charity Hospice in the Weald and reminded everybody, that he was undertaking a midnight walk and ask for peoples support in the form of sponsorship.

The Leader of the Council:

Reminded people that one of the Borough Partnerships was to focus on Digital access, transparency, and local democracy.

As part of that priority the Cabinet went on Tour over the Summer with meetings being held in Cranbrook and Sandhurst, he advised these meetings were well attended and provided the Cabinet with the opportunity to hear from residents

He announced it was the Cabinets intention to continue into the Autumn and announced the next meeting would be held in Pembury 27 October and Southborough 17 November and advised other locations would be announced in the new year.

The Chief Executive:

Advised that Claudette Valmond was no longer 'Interim Monitoring Officer' and had been awarded the position Full Time.

## **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

FC37/22 The Mayor advised that one question had been received from a member of the public had been received under Council Procedure Rule 8.

### **1. Question from Nigel Stapple**

"As an independent local political researcher, I work closely with a lot of community groups and speaking to a lot of people they share my view that the amount of display items in the museum are far less that the old museum. It was my understand that the remodelling of the Amelia Scott centre was to offer more display space, and that does not seem to be the case.

Another thing that has been brought to my attention is the signage, it seems somewhat confusing to a lot of people, and they are having trouble finding their way around, so my question really was, were the council aware to these concerns and if they were what are there any sort of projects or proposal to improve the current situation"

### **Answer from Councillor Fitzsimmons**

"Dear Mr Stapple, thank you for your question. Perceptions can clearly be deceiving as there is far more on display within The Amelia than in the old building including, for the first time, galleries and display cases that are capable of showing our collections to best effect. I am also thrilled that we have been able to include a much wider range of interpretation and interactive exhibits to inspire and attract new audiences and better to inform those who visit.

I am particularly pleased that we have managed to instal cases that are much more accessible to children and that are easier to open and change the displays. Finally, I am delighted that we have been able to introduce 'open storage' which has enabled us to bring many hundreds of exhibits out of the

basement where they would have historically been stored.

The Amelia has been a fantastic success – just under a month ago we welcomed our hundredth thousandth visitor and we are on a steeper growth in visitor numbers than the Turner in Margate. In the first week, we ran out of library cards, and we have had excellent engagement with the various activities we have run, the exhibitions we have held and the events we have run.

As far as signage is concerned Mr Stapple we have made big efforts to improve although it was designed to be clear we have actually added some news signs so I do not think there should be any problem in finding their way around the building and they can ask any member of staff who will be able to direct them”.

#### **Supplementary Question from Mr Stapple**

“There is a sign somewhere in the museum which clearly states that is less than 2% of the so-called archive is actually on display. So, I would like to ask has that archive actually ever been audited so we can establish what are the most appropriate finds relating to the history of our town”

#### **Supplementary Answer from Cllr Fitzsimmons**

“Thank you Mr Stapple I don’t actually know I can’t answer that question about the audit, but I will tell you that if there is anything in the archives that you would like to see that can make request and that item will be brought to the reading room for you”

### **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

FC38/22 The Mayor advised that three questions had been received from a member of the Council duly received under Council Procedure Rule 10.

#### **1 Question from Councillor Bailey**

“Given public concern over a perceived lack of impartiality in the recent parking consultation, can I ask what measures Cabinet will put in place to ensure future consultations are fair and transparent in order to restore public faith in the Council's consultation process”?

#### **Answer from Councillor Chapelard**

“Thank you for your question Councillor Bailey. Before I can give you an answer please could you clarify what you mean by “a perceived lack of impartiality”?

#### **Further clarification from Councillor Bailey**

“The question about whether people agreed with the new parking fees the two alternatives given to the new parking fees were a cut in services, and respondents were asked to list the services they wanted cut or a £10 increase in Council Tax there was no mention of any alternative revenue raising measures or any alternative cost cutting measures and I think a lot of people

were unhappy with the way the questions were phrased”.

### **Answer from Councillor Chapelard**

Thank you for you Mr Mayor for allowing that further clarification.

One of the Borough Partnership’s Focus on Five priorities is: Digital access, transparency, and local democracy.

This council works for residents and businesses and strives for the best for the borough. Our administration seeks to proactively engage with residents.

That means that this Council does need to explain to residents the financial context in which we deliver and the difficult choices we face. You will know that this administration has inherited a £944,000 budget deficit for this financial year.

The questions in the parking consultation asked residents to suggest alternative ways to reduce the deficit. There is no such thing as free parking. There is a cost to residents. It is about choices, and we need to explain this to residents and ask them for alternatives way of funding these choices.

The responses to these questions provided us with a number of useful suggestions on how to safeguard the council’s finances which is another one of the Borough Partnership’s Focus on Five priorities. Our administration is grateful for those leads and we are exploring some of them.

Further changes to residents’ consultation and engagement will be part of my Cabinet member plan which will be published in due course

### **Supplementary Question from Councillor Bailey**

“Can I ask whether the new guidelines for consultations will address the problems in this particular consultation that really have reduced public faith in the council, and whether they will follow best practice guidelines as set out by local government association including the principle of integrity”.

### **Supplementary Answer from Councillor Chapelard**

“Thank you Mr Mayor as part of my Cabinet member plan we will complete review the way we do consultations”.

### **2 Question from Councillor Bailey**

“Can I ask why the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting of 20th July did not contain any record of the comments made by the 10 registered speakers who spent over 30 minutes - or a third of the meeting - objecting to the Cabinet's proposed parking fee hikes and ask why these Minutes were approved unanimously by Cabinet despite this obvious omission being pointed out beforehand”.

**Answer from Councillor Chapelard**

Thank you for your question Councillor Bailey.

“As was explained to you at the Cabinet meeting (and as has been explained to councillors on a number of occasions), Council minutes are not intended to be verbatim transcripts but rather a summary of discussions and a record of decisions taken. As has also been explained, all committee meetings are recorded and available for review on the Council’s website if residents or councillors want to listen to the full contents of Council meetings”.

**Supplementary Question from Councillor Bailey**

“If the Cabinet is saying that the only true record of Cabinet Meetings is the recording  
can I ask first whether there is a policy of maintain the videos in perpetuity on the council’s website and. Secondly can I ask whether a moat can be put into the minutes in a prominent position saying these minutes may not actually be a true and accurate reflection of the meeting and referring them to the video”..

**Supplementary Answer from Councillor Chapelard**

“As part of our administration focus on five’s Councillor Hayward will be looking at reviewing the governance arrangements of the council, and this may well be part of it. We can of course put a link to the videos in the minutes that would be something we could do but I obviously can’t guarantee this at this stage as I am sure you can appreciate”.

**3 Question from Councillor Bailey**

“I recently reported to the Council a large piece of wood that had lain for a week or more on a pavement close to the Town Hall and visible from many Town Hall offices. Does the Borough Partnership have a plan for maintaining Tunbridge Wells town centre that does not rely on borough councillors reporting problems”?

**Answer from Councillor Everitt**

“Thank you for your question Councillor Bailey and taking the time to report the  
piece of wood referenced in your question.

I’ll admit I was rather perturbed when I read your question, you know more than  
most that we have a hard-working team of street cleansing employees and a host  
of volunteers who pick litter, look after floral displays, and take their time to report  
street scene issues. I welcome the reporting of issues by all- residents and

Councillors alike as it helps to focus our resources.

I don't think it is fair to ignore this collective contribution by alluding to this one incident and suggest that it relies on any one single contributor. We cannot stop incidents of littering in their entirety but so many people do their bit to fight it- I don't think we rely on solely the efforts of Borough councillors, let alone a single Councillor.

In regard to TW town centre, there is the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre plan currently in development that will encompass the public realm with a number of engagement events scheduled. I recommend your engagement with this process."

#### **Supplementary Question Councillor Bailey**

Last year myself and another former cabinet member pressed for a more proactive approach to maintain the town centres, and were promised an officer's report on the matter, can I ask the portfolio holder whether he is aware of this report, and whether it has been produced this is this something he share with full council.

#### **Supplementary Answer Councillor Everitt**

"Thank you, that is interesting, and I will follow it up after this meeting"

### **PETITION: KEEP 1 HOUR FREE PARKING IN PADDOCK WOOD**

FC39/22

#### **PETITION: KEEP 1 HOUR'S FREE PARING IN PADDOCK WOOD.**

The council received a petition containing over 1,000 signatures which stated "We the undersigned disapprove of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's decision to take away Paddock Woods first hour free parking with no public consultation. This is a lifeline for our local business who will be the ones who lose the foot fall though their doors and who are still recovering from covid restrictions".

Mr Richard Barsley and Mr Paul Smith were in attendance to present the petition which included the following comments.

- Prior to April 2016 Paddock Wood (PW) always had 2 hours free parking
- Around 2010 Borough Council (BC) contact PW and informed them the Car Park were not covering their costs and would be looking to increase charges to cover the running costs only and not for profit purposes..
- Claire Holly and John Barsley of PW Business Association compiled a report with suggestions for revenue generating activities which would cover the costs as well as provide a modest surplus
- Findings of these actions can be found in the PW Association minutes
- BC Further claimed they required an additional £20-£30 for car park resurfacing
- BC claim due to loss of 2<sup>nd</sup> hour parking there has been no impact on

footfall

- Data has shown the footfall has dropped by 12.5 % within the first year
- Discovered in July 2022 that the BC proposed increasing parking fees by 75% on the second hours and abolishing free parking in PW and Southborough however keeping free parking in St Johns.
- Justification was the need for new car charging points, even though the BC had received grants for this.
- Majority of residents are elderly and rely on the town centre for their shopping and are unable to use online forms.
- BC disallowed the first online petition on a technicality but has accepted the second written submission
- TWBC online petition was very biased, and the questions were not linked to the town's economies/services
- The matter cannot be resolved by a 5 Questions consultation
- Due to increased charges, there will be an increase in illegal parking in Commercial Road and surrounding areas
- Request for proper consultation is no required for shopping but for foodbanks, doctors, library, and visits to chemists etc
- Mary Portus was commission by Government to report on town centre decline  
where she reported parking fees killing town centres

## Speakers

Mr Jamil Nasir

- Advised that all residents were pleased that the decision had been reversed
- He thanked the coalition council for their actions
- Residents and Businesses still fear that town centre car parks were not included

Councillor Rutland moved and Councillor Warne seconded the motion. "The Council welcomes the petition and thanks those who signed it the council notes that cabinet have agreed to keep 1 hour free parking as requested by the petition.

Debate on the motions included the following points.

- In total over 3000 signatures collected which is high percentage of resident living in town and higher that percentage that vote in elections
- PW visitors can park illegally safe in the knowledge that they will not be caught due to lack of parking enforcement officers
- Free parking is an essential selling factor
- Borough Partnership were thanked for listening and changing their stance
- It was raised that due to the way the petitions had been handled and suppressed thousands of people disenfranchised due to technicalities
- Regrettable oversight before doing and consultation was rushed.
- Parking and car usage needs to be addressed with Net Zero targets
- Large retail spaces such as Bluewater cannot be allowed to attract

- shoppers away from town centre shopping.
- Concern around timelines of this free charge being applicable
  - It was requested that a timetable be compiled to act as a way forward
  - What should the future of the high street look like and it was felt it was an important decision that needs to be made

Councillor Rutland requested a recorded vote on the amendment

Members who voted in favour of the amendment: Councillors Allen, Atkins, Atwood, Bailey, Barrass, Barrington-King, Bland, Brice, Britcher-Allan, Chapelard, Dawlings, Fairweather, Ellis, Everitt, Fitzsimmons, Funnell, Dr Hall, hall, Hayward, Hill, Holden, Knight, Le Page, Lewis, Lidstone, March, McMillan, Moon, Morton, Neville, Patterson, Poile, Pope Pound, Roberts, Rogers, Rutland, Sankey, Wakeman, Warne, White, Wormington, (42)

**AMENDMENT CARRIED**

#### **CHANGES TO APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES (AUGUST 2022)**

FC40/22 Councillor Chapelard moved, and Councillor Warne seconded the recommendations set out in the report on the agenda.

The Mayor took a vote by affirmation

**RESOLVED** – the following seats would allocated as follows

Councillor Hickey would take the IND seat at F&G

Councillor Morton and Councillor Lidstone will take the vacant LD seat on A&G

Councillor Bailey will take the IND seat on P&T CAB

And the independent member of A&G committee replacing Mr Quigley should be Mr Turner and Mr Elliott

Councillor Barrington King requested the Council acknowledged the excellent work that Mr Tony Quigley had given over his stewardship on Audit and Governance, all were in agreement.



Councillor Rogers requested that Councillor Holden was placed on notice as chair as he has not chaired the meeting appropriately, it was felt he was unable to chair the meeting in a fair and honest way then a new chair needed to be nominated.

Councillor Warned noted the request and advised that this was not the forum to hold such a discussion, and a meeting would be taken offline and the input from the Monitoring Officer could be involved.

Councillor Holden responded to Councillor Rogers and advised he rejected her statement and agreed with Councillor Warne that this was not the forum for this to be raised

### **MOTION ON NOTICE FROM COUNCILLOR DR HALL**

FC41/22 Councillor Dr Hall moved, and Councillor Roberts seconded, the motion set out in the associated notice.

In moving the motion, comments included

- Consideration should be given to other products and not just glass
- Examples we discussed in other countries where recycling of Glass bottles was very favourable
- Request we raised as to whether Urbaser should be involved in such a scheme
- It was highlighted that some shops in TW were already offering money back on glass bottles

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation

### **URGENT BUSINESS**

FC42/22 There was no urgent business.

### **COMMON SEAL OF THE COUNCIL**

FC43/22 **RESOLVED** – That the Common Seal of the Council be affixed to any contract, minute, notice or other document arising out of the minutes or pursuant to any delegation, authority or power conferred by the Council.

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

FC44/22 The next scheduled meeting was Wednesday 14 December 2022

### **NOTES:**

The meeting concluded at 9.20 pm.