

# Minutes of Romsey Forum

## 15<sup>th</sup> September 2010 held at Romsey Town Hall

**Present:** David Barker, Sarah Hargreaves, Cllr Mark Cooper, Cllr Roy Perry, Sandra Smith, David Wilson (TVBC), Tessa Parker, Shirley Dawson, Vic Hemmings, Roger Prescott, Sarah Thorn, Nadine O'Connor, Matt O'Connor, Mike Richardson, Frank Akerman, Denise Amery, Phoebe Merrick.

**Speakers:** Dorothy Baverstock, Viv Messenger

**In the Chair:** John Parker. **Minutes:** Carolyn Nixon.

**Item 1: Apologies:-** Mike Hedderley, Julian Jones, Steve Lees, Heny Maddick, Geoff Morris, Ian Bullivant, Hal Sanchez, Ian Richards, Chris Amery. Caroline Nokes MP, Cllr Chris Lynn, Mayor of Test Valley.

### **Item 2: Minutes of the Romsey Forum 16<sup>th</sup> June 2010**

These had been circulated electronically and in hard copy at the meeting. Agreed as an accurate record.

**Item 3: Matters Arising.** None

### **Item 4: Appointment of Officers**

John Parker had indicated his wish to stand down as Chair and Mark Cooper had offered to take his place unless anyone else was prepared to volunteer. Proposed by C Nixon, seconded by D Baverstock that Mark Cooper be Chair for the coming year. Carried. Sandra Smith and Carolyn Nixon agreed to continue as Joint Secretaries and Nadine O'Connor offered to be Vice Chair. Mike Richardson moved a vote of thanks to the retiring Chair and the Joint Secretaries.

### **Item 5 : "Romsey Town Centre – Fail or Flourish ?" Dorothy Baverstock**

DB had convened an Open Meeting for the following week to discuss what she saw as the current problems besetting Romsey Town centre. Many people felt, like her, that there was now an imbalance between service providers, such as estate agents and hairdressers, and retail outlets. There was also now a preponderance of charity shops because, with their lower overheads, they could afford to pay the high rents demanded by landlords of retail premises. Shoppers were attracted to towns which offered diversity and personality, as had been proved by the increasing popularity of places such as Lymington and Petersfield. She hoped that at her meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September, which would be attended by officers from TVBC and HCC, people would come forward with suggestions as to how we could help Romsey to flourish.

#### **Comments from the floor :**

- Need for visionary marketing plan for Romsey and a discrete on-line presence. (Matt O'Connor)
- Need to be careful not to talk Romsey down – it is not a town in decline and the market, for example, is much improved. Traders also need to take some responsibility for attracting more people to the town. (Roy Perry)
- Romsey suffers from its proximity to large shopping centre in Southampton. (Phoebe Merrick)
- The Market Place suffers from lack of footfall. Plans for re-development have fallen through in the past, due to lack of acceptance by residents. Romsey and District Society are looking again at how the area can be enhanced but there is currently no funding available. (Mark Cooper)
- The Farmers' Market has fewer stalls since its removal from the town centre to Waitrose car park. It is felt that inadequate signage to the event contributes to lower attendance. (In response, David Wilson from TVBC stated that he believed planning permission for the erection of directional signs would shortly be granted).

## **Item 6: Romsey Town Access Plan : Viv Messenger (TVBC Planning Officer)**

The aim of these plans was to improve accessibility into their local town for walkers and cyclists. Twenty such plans were being prepared within Hampshire. Andover's Plan had already been adopted and one for Test Valley rural areas was about to be completed. The Romsey Plan had been drawn up by TVBC, with assistance from HCC, in hopes of its being adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance in early 2011. It was informed by surveys done by local groups, street audits carried out by volunteer residents and discussions with local retailers. Many of the issues identified had been known for some time but it was hoped that, in bringing them together in an Action Plan, action could more readily be taken when funding became available.

Public Consultation on the Plan would take place between 17 Sept and 22 Oct. Once agreed by the Council, the Plan would be updated on a regular basis.

VM gave an overview of the various sections of the Action Plan, with some specific examples, including work on access to the Down platform at the railway station and improvements to the Barge Canal footpath. She made clear that Section 106 contributions were required by law from developments such as Abbotswood, to ensure that any adverse impact on the surrounding area is minimised. Therefore the immediate vicinity of the new housing area would see the most benefit but then access routes from the site to schools and employment would also see improvements. The funding would come onstream as the houses were occupied.

Comments from the floor :

- The boundaries for the Plan should include parts of Romsey Extra, such as Highwood Lane, where possible sites for future housing have been identified.
- When selecting material for town centre surfaces, consideration should be given to the fact that they are going to be regularly dug up.
- Need for joined up thinking with regard to speed limits, with graduated restrictions at town entry points.

## **Item 7 : Planning Update : Viv Messenger**

Abbotswood Development : Full approval for the plans was granted by TVBC on 9 September 2010, with the construction expected to begin some time in 2011, continuing through to spring 2012.

Other Housing Proposals : Planning applications for 1500 houses in Halterworth and 44 dwellings at Nutburn Road/Botley Road in N Baddesley had been refused. This was on the basis of officers' advice that sufficient housing stock was available or in the pipeline to meet the needs of the area for the next five years. However, as there is currently no agreed core strategy, this opinion is open to legal challenge, as is already happening at Redbridge Lane. Until the core strategy process is completed in late 2012, it is likely that there will be many planning applications put in, which could prove costly to the Local Authority.

## **Item 8 : Any Other Business**

Concessionary travel : Cllr Cooper reported that TVBC had just agreed that the subsidies (current budget £58,000) granted to volunteer groups which take people to medical and dental appointments would continue for the coming year. This was in spite of the fact that the bus pass scheme would in future be administered and funded by HCC.

League of Friends, Romsey Hospital : Open Meeting on local health provision. 21.10.10

Next meeting Wed 17 November 2010, 7.30pm, Romsey Town Hall