

Minutes of Romsey Forum

20 June 2012 held at Romsey Town Hall

Present: Eunice Hutchinson, Mary Hill, Diane Hargreaves, Jean Russell, Julian Jones, John Parker, Geoff Uglow, Janet Coppard, Jeff Hawksley, Mavis Hawksley, Mike Gray, Jan Gray, Tom Hanslip, Olwen Greenwood, Janet Burnage, Simon Clothier, Richard Jordan-Baker (Broadlands), Kate Morris, Geoff Morris, Jo White, John Burgess, Ian Bullivant, Peter Hurst, Kath Tilling.

Speakers : David Bibby, Planning Policy, (TVBC); Nicola Horsey, Head of Hampshire Libraries; Sarah Teers, Head of Registration, HCC; Dreana Bloomfield, Unison Rep for TVBC staff

Chair : Mark Cooper **Minutes :** Carolyn Nixon

1 **Apologies:** Sandra Smith, Glyn Darby, Dr Gill Roberts, Phoebe Merrick, Mike Bull, Ian Hibberd, Sandra Gidley, Ian Tripp, Rev Tim Sledge, Steve Lees; Mayor of Test Valley, Cllr Dorothy Baverstock.

2. Minutes of the Romsey Forum held on 21st March 2012

The minutes had been circulated and were agreed as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

Closure of Ashfield Bridge : It was expected that the bridge would reopen at midnight on 22 June. However temporary traffic lights would need to be installed for a limited period while anti-skid treatment was applied to the road surface. This could not be done until the surface had settled.

Romsey Town Centre – future developments : Representatives from Tesco had already made a presentation to TVBC councillors. They had been unable to accept an invitation to speak at the Forum meeting in September but had requested that a separate special meeting be held. It was unlikely that this would be possible. A public exhibition of the Tesco proposals was to be held at town centre venues on 20th and 21st July.

Junction Improvements : Although some houses were now occupied on the Abbotswood site, the trigger for S106 funding had not yet been reached. Occupation of the 'affordable' housing was currently ahead of private transactions.

4. Core Strategy (the Local Plan) update : David Bibby, Senior Planning Officer (TVBC);

The recent public consultation had produced approx 1000 responses from individuals and organisations, 400 of which came from Whitenap residents. The national planning policy framework (NPPF) had now been published, in parallel with the Localism Act, which meant the TVBC planners had to take these into account when finalising the Local Plan. This also had to be updated, in keeping with a review of the locally set housing requirement and sustainability appraisal. There would be a second stage of public consultation later in the year, after which the resulting document would be submitted to the Inspector. However, local planning authorities are no longer bound to accept the Inspector's recommendations but the SE Plan has not yet been repealed and its regionally set housing requirement remains relevant. In respect of this, Cllr Cooper pointed out that TVBC had recently lost an appeal against a housing development application for an area of land in N Baddesley close to Baddesley Common.

Romsey Master Plan : It was still being considered as to how this could be moved forward and further consultation was planned.

5. Closure of TVBC Office in Duttons Road

The Forum Chair explained the background to the proposed closure. There had been 3 Options suggested by TVBC officers for the premises. All 5 TVBC Cabinet members, none of whom represented southern wards, had voted in favour of Option 3, which was to vacate and market the office building in Duttons Road and to purchase from HCC the Former Magistrate's Court (FMC) in Church Street. HCC's Adult Services would retain a presence in the building but

would be joined by TVBC front-line staff, Test Valley Community Services and possibly also Romsey Citizen's Advice Bureau.

62 staff would be moved to Beech Hurst, TVBC's main office in Andover, and there would be no staff redundancies. The move would result in an estimated saving of £100k p.a. All services currently based in Romsey would re-locate but a customer service unit would be set up in the FMC, with access to all necessary Council information, and a planning officer would also be based there. Other officers would be brought to Romsey when required. All planning paper archives would be kept at Beech Hurst but all applications since 2003 had been available on-line. Requests might in future be considered to bring paper plans to Romsey from Andover.

At this point, several members of staff from the Duttons Road office joined the meeting, to report their opposition to a move which now appeared to be inevitable. Part-time staff would be particularly affected. Unison representative, Dreana Bloomfield stated that negotiations had resulted in staff who lived in Romsey being offered a travel allowance for up to 18 months and consideration being given to provision of a mini-bus for the same period for those who lacked their own transport. The additional travel up and down the Valley would result in an increase of 2% in the Borough Council's carbon footprint. The Tree Officer and the Landscape Officer would no longer be as easily available to callers as at present.

Cllr Cooper stated that the Duttons Road site would have to be marketed for employment/commercial use for 6 months but thereafter it could be sold for other use, such as a residential care home.

The final decision would be taken by full Council at the end of the week. *(later agreed by full Council)*. Members of the Forum wanted to put on record their thanks to TVBC staff for continuing to work at their usual high standard at a time when financial restraints were putting services under pressure.

6. Closure of Register Office at Hayter House, Romsey

Cllr Cooper stated that HCC proposed to vacate and sell its premises at Hayter House, Cupernham and set up an office within the Romsey Library building but with a separate entrance. An accessible venue would need to be found for simple wedding ceremonies.

Sarah Teers, HCC's Head of Registration, stated that a 3-month public consultation, via the HCC website <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/registration/consultation.htm>, would begin the following week and that no decisions had yet been made. It was not the intention to enter into competition with other registered wedding venues. Nicola Horsey, Head of Hampshire Libraries, stated that there was currently an area in Romsey Library which was available to staff visiting the building and that this could be used by the Registrar. It was not proposed to take over any space currently used by the public. She added that HCC had already carried out several such integration projects and that feedback from users had been positive.

Registering a death : In answer to questions, Ms Teers said that appointments needed to be made through the HCC contact centre and that the requirement to register within 5 days was not legally binding, especially if there were insufficient appointments available within the time limit at a particular register office. *Tell Us Once* : this service had been set up by the Dept. of Work and Pensions and is offered at the time a death is registered. It ensures that all relevant agencies are informed of a death while the bereaved need inform only one advisor. The person registering the death is later informed as to which agencies have received the information.

7 Any Other Business

Bridge Works at Greatbridge : Part of the A3057 Greatbridge Road to Stockbridge would be closed near The Duke's Head from 12th September 2012, for a limited period, to allow the rebuilding of the river bridge. Diversions would be in place via Belbins and Fishlake Meadows.

Broadlands : The House would be open to visitors from the following Monday for a limited period.

8. Date of Next Meeting : Wednesday 19th September 2012, 7.30pm, Romsey Town Hall

Meetings 2012 : 19th September, 21st November