

Minutes of Romsey Forum

16 March 2011 held at Romsey Town Hall

Present: Robert Grime, Diane Hargreaves, Vic Hemmings, Eunice Hutchison, Julian Jones, John Parker, Ian Tripp, Geoff Uglow, Mike Wenman, Roger Prescott, Judith Giles, Christine Watkins, Mark Bramley, Ian Richards, Doug Cramond, Geoff Morris, Richard Jordan-Baker, Chris Maidens, Peter Checksfield, Neill Beasley, Mary Hill, Roger Prescott, Ian Bullivant, Stephen Beasley, Gordon Rogers, David Bibby (TVBC), Teresa Hibberd, Cllr Zilliah Brooks (Deputy Mayor, TVBC).

Speakers : Dorothy Baverstock; Roger Tetstall; Steve Lees

Chair Mark Cooper **Minutes** Carolyn Nixon

1 **Apologies:** Sandra Smith, Jane Brambley, Mike Richardson, Nadine O'Connor, Cllr Roy Perry, Caroline Nokes MP, John Blackmore, Jill Gethin, Karen Dunleavey, Tessa Parker.

2 **Minutes of the Romsey Forum held on November 17th 2010**

Agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

3 **Romsey : a successful town centre.** Dorothy Baverstock (Town Cllr)

Two public meetings had now been held to discuss the issues which were seen as having a detrimental effect on the town centre. It appeared that both retailers and shoppers were not as satisfied with the current state of the town as some recent economic reports would suggest. It was felt that there was a definite need for a discrete tourism strategy for Romsey and the Town Council had accepted the desirability of appointing a part time Tourism Officer. As a result of funding from the Town Council, TVBC, HCC (Cllr Mark Cooper's community fund) and donations from leisure providers, a total of £10,000 had been raised for this purpose.

Two web addresses had already been purchased : *destinationromsey.com* and *destinationromsey.co.uk* and coach tour operators were being approached to make Romsey a designated stopover for meal breaks. Cunard had agreed to offer a visit to Romsey as one of their tours for cruise passengers. TVBC had commissioned a study by Southampton University into the reasons that people visit the town and how best to increase footfall. TVBC transport officers were also considering making it possible to pay remotely for an extension of parking time in town centre car parks.

The Town Clerk was to investigate the best parking arrangements for visiting coaches and to ensure that they would be deterred from stopping in the town centre, with engines idling. Extra effort was also being made to keep the town centre clean, including an ongoing battle to prevent pigeons from roosting on Superdrug's premises.

4. **The Localism Bill and its implications for Test Valley : Roger Tetstall, Chief Exec TVBC**

In his presentation, Mr Tetstall set out the aims of the Bill, which he understood were to drive decentralisation, to empower local communities and to strengthen the accountability Government to local people. However, he considered it to be skeletal in concept - a "loose bunch of ideas", where a huge amount of detail would need to be filled in by subordinate regulations, which were the responsibility of the Secretary of State. The draft date for implementation was April 2012 but certain clauses could be brought in earlier, where there was no need for regulations.

The Bill stated that Community Empowerment would involve : the right to challenge; the right to buy; local referendums and the veto of council taxes. The 'community' would be represented by the Parish Council, which would have to invoke such powers should its members so wish.

As an example of the 'right to buy', should the owner of the Brewery site wish to sell and the land could be designated 'of community value', then the community could seek to acquire it. However, it was not clear how such action could/would be financed.

Local referendums could be called for by petition of 5% of the electors in the area to which the matter applied. The result would not be binding on the local authority, which would however have to show reasons if it failed to honour the result. A referendum could also be held for the community to make choices on council tax rises. The Bill claims to strengthen local democracy by allowing councils to revert to the committee system, should they so wish, and by introducing directly elected mayors.

The planning system would be reformed, to provide incentives for communities to drive development, by way of Neighbourhood Development Orders. However, local authorities would still have to address strategic housing needs, using similar principles as those of the SE Plan, so that the same targets would remain. Furthermore, a new homes bonus scheme would be offered as an incentive to build. The Local Development Framework process would be retained but simplified and Government Inspectors would no longer have the power to rewrite them. When selling a property, Home Information Packs would no longer be required but energy certificates would still be mandatory. Some reform of the social housing system was also proposed.

In response to questions from the floor, Mr Tetstall agreed that the Bill's proposals appeared to be loading a lot of extra responsibilities on Parish Councils and that the Secretary of State had the power to provide extra finance for this but he was not sure how. Where a parish council existed, it would not be possible for other local groups to pursue an initiative in its place. He also thought that a 'neighbourhood area' was subject to definition and could cross the boundaries of more than one parish.

Roger Tetstall was thanked for his lucid explanation of a complex Bill.

5 **Planning Update: Steve Lees, TVBC Forward Planning.**

Core Strategy: This will be a test of the new Localism agenda. The new version will go to Cabinet in September/October of this year.

Town Access Plan: has been approved by Cabinet and Council and will be an important tool for obtaining funding.

Abbotswood: additional fencing has been erected round the site for security reasons. It is hoped to maintain access for dog walkers. Positive decisions are now awaited on the main infrastructure. A consultation, by means of a leaflet drop and exhibition in Duttons Road, would be held on minor traffic changes. The Cupernham Lane junction had been designed to have a responsive traffic light system.

Brewery site : it appeared that some minor work was being carried out, enough to fend off any plans for compulsory purchase. Drainage issues at the site had been resolved.

Railway station : the first phase of the access improvements was nearly completed and there would be an official opening of the entrance to the far side platform the following week. There was still a need for relevant signage and it was hoped that the area round the ramp would be planted out, with the help of the community rail volunteers.

Ashfield Bridge : this would be closed for re-building, for 3 months from September, following the Romsey Show. It would involve a long and complex, official diversion via Totton. There would also be rolling closures of Lee Lane and Spaniards Walk. The rail bridge on the old Salisbury road would also be closed for a short period over Christmas 2011.

Housing in N Baddesley : developers were appealing the decision to refuse 44 dwellings at Nutburn Road/Botley Road.

6 Any Other Business

Town Centre planning : Test Valley Partnership manager was holding a consultation in the Town Hall on 18 March. Romsey & District Society was spearheading a new initiative to improve the design of the town centre. A talk by urban designer, Ben Hamilton Bailie, would be held at the Plaza Theatre on 23 March.

Minerals and Waste Plan : HCC was currently holding a consultation on the Plan (closing 24 March). Of relevance to Romsey, the landfill void at Squabb Wood would be increased but the proposals to extend Roke Quarry and to carry out gravel extraction at Halterworth would no longer be taken forward. In reporting this, John Parker suggested that interested residents should write to the county to applaud these decisions.

Christmas Committee : Ian Richards announced that this new group, supported by the Town Council, would meet on 6 April to plan the future of Christmas celebrations in the town centre. The arrangements for the Christmas lights would no longer be the sole responsibility of the Chamber of Trade.

7 Date of Next Meeting : Wednesday 15 June 2011, 7.30pm, Romsey Town Hall

Future Meetings : 21st September and 16th November 2011.