

# Minutes of Romsey Forum

## 16 November 2011 held at Romsey Town Hall

**Present:** Julian Jones, John Parker, Ian Tripp, Geoff Uglow, Doug Cramond, Chris Maidens, Stephen Beasley, Mary Hill, Roger Prescott, Ian Bullivant, John Bennett, Barbara Milburn, Stephen Davies, Matthew Towl (Broadlands), Olwen Greenwood, Janet Coppard, Mavis Sawdy, Chris Amery, Denise Amery, Peter Hurst, John Mason, Dorothy Baverstock, David Bibby (TVBC)

**Speakers :** Professor Michelle Low and Katherine Cudworth; Steve Lees (TVBC); Ian Richards

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

1 **Apologies:** Sandra Smith, Jane Brambley, Mike Richardson, Steve Corbett (Waitrose), Phoebe Merrick, Sue Derbyshire, Sandra Gidley, Hal Sanchez.

### 2 **Minutes of the Romsey Forum held on September 21<sup>st</sup> 2011**

It was pointed out that John Parker could not have seconded the minutes of the June meeting, as he had not been present. Other than this detail, the minutes were agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

### 3 **Romsey Town Centre Study : Michelle Low & Kate Cudworth, University of Southampton**

Prof Lowe introduced the report of the study, which she had designed, with the work being carried out by Ms Cudworth. The University had an international reputation for such studies and had recently completed one on market towns, which was why TVBC officers had suggested her team put in a bid for the work. Having won the bid, she was able to call on the co-operation of the geography and geodata departments of the University in assistance with the analysis. A written report had been presented to TVBC.

The study had looked at shopping patterns, both food and non-food and at linked trips within the town. Traders and a targeted range of shoppers had been interviewed over a ten-day period, which included Saturdays. The results compared favourably with similar towns in the South West. Responses of particular note :

- Food shopping was the main reason given for coming in to town but non-food played a significant part. 65% of interviewees agreed that their shopping needs were covered
- Waitrose was the most used for food; Boots for non-food
- Waitrose generated 69% of linked trips
- 34% walked; 2% cycled
- 40% stayed between 40 mins and one hour
- 76% of those aged 60+ do their food shopping in Romsey; under 34's shop elsewhere
- poor range of white goods/electronic/media; limited choice of national chains
- 27% disagreed that it was easy to park but on the day only 7% had difficulty

Traders thought that 'expensive parking' and 'higher business rates' were main barriers and 46% thought that footfall had declined, whereas in actual fact this was not the case. The current vacancy rate was 7.1%, compared with the national average of 13-14%.

TVBC had discussed the possibility of further studies being carried out on those residents who do not shop in Romsey and the results of a telephone survey about non-food shopping were now available on the council website (search for 'test valley shopping survey').

Prof Lowe agreed that parking kept coming up as an issue and therefore needed to be looked at but Cllr Cooper referred to a report on the TVBC website which showed that the introduction of free parking would have to be funded by council tax rises of up to £60 per cap.

#### 4. **Test Valley Core Strategy : Steve Lees, TVBC Forward Planning**

At its full Council meeting on 10 November, Test Valley Borough Councillors had agreed to publish the core strategy planning document for public consultation in January 2012. This fact had been taken into account when the appeal against refusal to grant planning permission on Highwood Lane, Halterworth had been denied. It was expected that the strategy would be approved by 2013, in order to provide a planning framework up until 2031.

The strategy defines the boundaries of expansion, with the proposed new housing sites still being for Whitenap (1500) and Hoe Lane, Baddesley (300). TVBC, as the local authority, is now responsible for housing numbers but has to draw up and follow a housing scenario paper, which takes into account the large number of people on the housing register. The building rate proposed is 172 dwellings each year in Southern Test Valley. However, the current building programme is very slow, with only one house so far having been sold at Abbotswood.

Other proposals within the strategy were for an outdoor sports centre at Ganger Farm and a forest park at Rownhams.

In answer to questions, it was stated that

- It was expected that 30 new houses p.a. would be built in each of the villages
- Wellow becoming part of mid-Hants under the new boundary proposals would be to the advantage of STV, in terms of accommodating the housing numbers
- That the master plan for Abbotswood was available at TVBC offices, as well as individual planning applications – only Bellway Homes actually building at present
- The planned number of dwellings in Southern Test Valley was lower than that demanded by previous PUSH (Partnership for Urban South Hants) proposals
- The definition of 'sustainable development' was unclear
- Perceived benefits of alignment with PUSH include economic partnership, having the ear of Government, extra funding for studies etc.

Cllr John Parker (Romsey Extra) reported that the Planning Inspector had cited uncertainty surrounding the rules on deliverability as a reason for rejecting the developers' bid at Halterworth. This was enough to prevent him from allowing preservation of the gap between Halterworth and North Baddesley to be overridden.

#### 5 **Street closures /Christmas celebrations : Cllr Ian Richards.**

The Town Council had originally proposed that The Hundred be closed to traffic every Saturday for a trial period but TVBC could only offer to administer a pilot of two Saturdays. The suggestion that these be in December was opposed by the Chamber of Commerce, whose members wished to defer the experiment to the New Year.

However, the town centre would be closed as usual for the Switching On of the Christmas Lights / Carnival procession on 26 Nov and Late Night Shopping / Arrival of Santa on 9<sup>th</sup> December. Transition Town Romsey would be offering workshops and performance of a Mummies' Play in King John's House on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, as part of a move to encourage more people into town on that Saturday.

#### 6 **Any Other Business**

Neighbourhood Plans : Cllr Peter Hurst (Whitenap) reported that the Town Council, with Romsey Extra Parish Council, was looking at the possibility of developing a shared policy, which might, according to the proposed Localism Act, take precedence over the Core Strategy.

Boundary Commission proposals : It was proposed that Romsey would lose its status as a constituency, with its Town and Romsey Extra wards being subsumed into New Forest East. Deadline for comments on the proposals : 5<sup>th</sup> December.

#### 7 **Date of Next Meeting : Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012, 7.30pm, Romsey Town Hall**