

# Draft Minutes from the meeting of the St. Johns' Road Residents Association held on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2019 at Southborough Fire Station.

**Members Present:** Marguerita Morton (Chair), Tony Mole (Secretary), Christine Burden (Treasurer), Maurice and Vera Findlay.

**Also Present:** Adrian Berendt (Chair of Tunbridge Wells Forum) and Cllr Peter Lidstone (sits on the J.T.B.)

1. **Apologies:** None.
2. **Minutes from last meeting:** approved by unanimous consent.
3. **AGM votes:** TM nominated MM as Chair, seconded by the floor. MM nominated TM as Secretary, seconded by the floor. MM nominated CB as Treasurer, seconded by TM. TM noted that due to other commitments he would only take the position of Secretary unless a replacement could be found, so this position is open for new appointment if an association member would like to undertake these duties.
4. **Chairpersons Report:** MM said that as Chair of Tunbridge Wells Forum, Adrian Berendt can inform us of lots of things happening around the town and in our area.

Adrian asked how far along St Johns Road the SJRRA covered. Also informed that the SJRRA was originally formed prior to the restructuring of the traffic lights to address the 'rat run' issue. Touched on possible solutions, e.g. closing the slip-road, or making it one-way. MM commented that these propositions had been discounted because it meant closing the end of the road which was declared dangerous.

Adrian asked whether Majestic Wine was closing following recent press coverage. Members were unsure but believe as it's a prime site that it would remain open.

Peter Lidstone mentioned "Next Door" website ([nextdoor.co.uk](http://nextdoor.co.uk)) where residents can report issues, crimes etc. He explained that this is a private social media website for your neighbourhood and to sign up you must use your real details as they are validated against electoral roll before allowing you access. This means that there cannot be any anonymous slander or horrible comments against users. There is also a section for selling things, so is a typical social media type site. MM said that she is, so far unable to get on to it.

Adrian said that when they restructured the traffic lights, 2 -3 years ago, they did so with funding out of a 'growth fund' from the LEP, local enterprise partnership. They were given about £1.5m, but they left about £1m unspent. They bid to put two mini roundabouts in, and to rephrase the lights. The rest was to install a cycle lane as far as they could between Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge. This scheme was universally popular and lots of people expressed support for it. Adrian said that about 200 people wrote in to support it. They then produced a couple of designs. The JTB, joint transportation board, approved the designs twice at two different stages. After this it had to go through a process called the TRO, Traffic Regulation Order, to allow for no parking and other legal changes to be made to the road. This is a statutory consultation and if anyone proves the TRO isn't valid it can be overturned. There were two places along the route where objections were raised – near Southfield Road, where there are a handful of parking spaces along St Johns Road. Another from people who live between

Bidborough and Tonbridge – These were not objections based on legal grounds, more because they didn't like the idea of having a cycle way outside their properties. Nonetheless it was decided not to proceed with either design by certain councillors and since then they have been trying to get them reinstated. Adrian mentioned that the design was implementing Jislon posts to segregate pedestrian, cycle and motor traffic. TM commented that it was disappointing that after the BUG, bicycle users' group, meetings over the last few years at Skinners School and TWGSB where various major improvements had been promised and then the net result was just to repaint the red cycle lane, with no improvements whatsoever.

Adrian mentioned that Waltham Forest, in North London, is a good example where proper cycling infrastructure has been implemented and there have been tangible benefits in traffic improvements and public health. Apparently, the restructuring has reduced traffic load by 50-60% in the area. They also used to have 60,000 properties in their borough which were in areas which exceed government guideline levels of pollution and since the changes they now have 6,000 which is a 90% reduction of people living beyond acceptable pollution levels.

Adrian said that the level of air pollution along St Johns is one of the worst in the county and also commented that they don't measure the 2.5 micron particulates, which are the most harmful as they pass straight into the bloodstream, they only measure the 10 micron particulates. The monitoring station nearest us is has the highest pollution levels along St. Johns Road. Apparently 60% of local car journeys are under 5 miles and 30% less than 1 mile!

TM commented that it is now quicker to drive to Bluewater for shopping, benefiting from free parking and a better selection, than it is to drive into Tunbridge Wells.

Adrian said that the council is producing a new local plan which will provide about 13,000 new homes in the borough over the next 20 years. The draft should be published in May, then it will be open for public consultation over the summer. Apparently, the majority of housing will NOT be in the Tunbridge Wells area itself. There is talk of a 'garden village' somewhere in the county and quite a lot of development in the Paddock Wood area. There is also a plan to relocate the football club.

Someone has singularly bought a large chunk of land in Reynolds Lane, but as yet no application has been received for any developments there.

Adrian commented that the car is being given priority over pedestrians and cyclists, which is causing lots of issues by way of pollution etc. He said that this is most evident when you walk around the town looking at ease for pedestrians... a clear example of this is the use of *Belmouth Junctions* at intersections to allow cars to enter and exit at speed, but which also means that pedestrians in some cases must walk 25m to cross a road! Some of the pedestrian crossings change so quickly that the elderly don't have time to clear the junction before the traffic lights change in favour of traffic again.

It was commented that the southern exit from the slip road, where the keep clear road marking is, is always blocked by people who stop across the junction and that a yellow box junction would be far more effective, and we believe was originally promised.

Adrian said that there is a move to make the central area of Tunbridge Wells pedestrianised. This would involve moving the bus stops in the centre of town.

Peter Lidstone said that at the council's overview and scrutiny meeting last week they were advised that there is a £600m backlog of pothole repairs. This is another reason to try and reduce the number

of unnecessary car journeys in the town. Primarily HGVs are exacerbating the problem and restricting them to major routes and motorways would help alleviate the problem. The way the problem is that unless KCC change their way of thinking they cannot repair the roads fast enough as they don't have the substructure to support forty-ton lorries and this is compounding the problem. There is a likelihood that at a point in the future KCC may decide to only maintain major roads and end up closing smaller roads and stop cars using them.

Maurice Findlay noted that the hedge cutting along St Johns is not being done at regular interval. When the hedge along the slip road was recently cut, the workers left the debris on the road and he had to report it to the council – who did duly send a team to clear the road up. Also, the drains are not cleared out regularly and the school children regularly block them by pushing their rubbish, paper, cans, etc, into the drains.

The drainage at the bottom of the town has now been resolved by putting an overflow into *The Grom*, which is in underground culvert which we think runs along to Ramslye near the Spa Valley Railway. There was talk that an underground tunnel built by 1 Warwick Park Hotel has caused the recent drainage issues as prior to this there was never any flooding.

TM noted that SJRRA has become quite dormant over recent years which is a good sign that residents are generally quite happy with the current situation as when there is an issue more people attend meetings. Adrian asked if there were any concerns about development works in the St Gregory's School area – the feeling from the floor was that there were no immediate concerns. The hockey pitch installations which were proposed along Chestnut Avenue were met with strong opposition from nearby residents and plans had been shelved for the moment.

MM says a resident has raised concerns about drug dealing close to their property and says that the police are currently investigating. Details not noted as this seems to be an active investigation.

Adrian asked what the thoughts were in respect to the new Tunbridge Wells Theatre – TM said that it could be a good thing, but the time needed to recoup the costs will be protracted.

Baxalls in Paddock Wood have been appointed contractors for the construction of the Southborough Hub. The feeling is that the flats which have now been built have been finished in a very odd-looking brick finish which is not sympathetic to the surroundings. The plan is for the library to relocate into the Southborough Hub when its completed. Peter noted that the plans for a café has been replaced with a coffee machine, but a larger kitchen is proposed. It has already been agreed that the doctor's surgery will relocate here after construction and the plan is to provide more doctors and a larger surgery. Apparently, there is no affordable housing being provided in the Southborough Hub development. The requirement is for 35% of the new homes to be affordable... but frequently developers renege on this requirement by using a viability clause which demonstrates that they are not making any profit and therefore justification to not abide by this. However, MM says in this case they were contributing a percentage of their profits in the cost of the Southborough Hub and were therefore allowed to not include any affordable properties.

MM commented that Tunbridge Wells has been listed in the *Rotten Borough's* section of edition 1493 of Private Eye. It states; *A £90m plan including a new theatre and civic centre is a needless 'vanity project', say critics – and it's making some Tory councillors very nervous.*

5. **Continuation of SJRRA after May Elections:** MM says she is standing as candidate for Councillor of St Johns'. Adrian Berendt said he would check whether MM is able to hold the post of Councillor for

St. Johns' ward and still Chair of SJRRA and attend Tunbridge Wells Forum meetings, wearing either her Councillors or SJRRA hat depending on the situation. He said he thinks it is allowed and would check the constitution and let MM know.

6. **Treasurers Report:** No changes, the account still has £5.00 deposited. It seems that to retain association membership, the requirement for SJRRA to have a bank account is no longer needed – therefore CB will contact the bank and have the account closed. Until this time, CB will remain SJRRA Treasurer.
7. **Any Other Business:** None mentioned.

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