

16 July 2009

To: Councillor Leonard Price, Mayor of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells, and  
Councillor of Culverden Ward, Royal Tunbridge Wells

## QUESTIONS

### re: Cinema Site and RTW Conservation Area at Risk

>>>>

I am writing to you in your capacity as chairman of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council as I think the following should be addressed at **Full Council**.

The RTW Town Forum has in their objectives as first issue:

Royal Tunbridge Wells is becoming clear of **'Grot Spots' with priority on the Ritz Building / Cinema Site by 2010.**

### Cinema site

#### Business rates

When the RTW TF objectives were endorsed, we had been made promises that demolition of the cinema site would commence in January 2009. Up to then the usual excuse was that business rates are paid and after demolition that would not be the case anymore, therefore a demolition would not be in the best interest of the Council. This was suggested at various Town Forum meetings in 2007-2008 by former Cllr Wakefield, Sean Clark, Robert Cottrill and the Leader of the Council Roy Bullock (his online-blog). However on asking for the exact amount of business rates paid, Sean Clark revealed that no business rates are charged.

- Would it not have been (and still is) the duty of the Council, that if business rates were applicable for the Cinema site, that the owners would have been charged business rates?

### Demolition

As obviously the excuse of business rates did not hold, what other possible delays could there be? Mr Swann, representing the developer had told members of the Town Forum that he as well would be glad to see a demolition asap. This was in February 2008 and reconfirmed in September 2008.

- What is the position of Network Rail? Is it confirmed by now that there will be no complications to the tunnel and that Network Rail has given its consent?

### Construction

Among the many rumours we heard was that the developer has not found yet an operator for the planned hotel section and they have difficulties to find a management company for the office block.

- If it is confirmed that contracts with these parties are signed, would it be possible for you to let us know who they are.

A further problem to implement the plans for the site seems to be two claimed rights of way.

- Are this rights confirmed now and if, is the developer going into appeal?
- How long could such a procedure take?
- In case of the rights becoming lawfully established will a new planning application be needed?

## English Heritage

### Conservation Area at Risk

Of the 25 Conservation Areas in the Borough of Tunbridge Wells, the only declared to be at Risk – is the one of **Royal Tunbridge Wells**. This verdict might have a wide impact on economy, house prices and tourism.

- What is the Council intending to do to reverse this?

**Here is what English Heritage suggests:**

### What Local Authorities can do

- Make sure that Article 4 Directions are being used where they can help protect the local character.
- Take rapid Enforcement Action against unauthorised development to maintain standards and consistency.
- Make sure each conservation area has had a Character Appraisal carried out which will identify clearly and specifically which buildings and features contribute towards the area's character and which don't.
- Provide each conservation area with a Management Plan that includes policies for its streetscape, highways, landscapes and public spaces. They help ensure that the special character is protected when making decisions on planning applications or in identifying projects of enhancement to the public spaces.
- Use the guidance of [English Heritage's Streets for All](#) to make sure the streetscape is managed in an integrated way.
- Identify historic buildings at risk within the conservation area and prepare an action plan for their repair and reuse.
- Make sure they appoint an elected member Heritage Champion and listen to the views they gather from meeting local people.
- Give residents and local businesses information about the benefits and restrictions that come with Conservation Area designation and work with local groups on the long-term stewardship of the area.