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The Strategic Plan (– TWBC’s approach to delivering its CORPORATE PRIORITIES –)

is grounded on the results of a wide range of consultation exercises including:

- *Community Strategy consultation;*
- *Housing Strategy consultation;*
- *Regular, ongoing dialogue with parish councils, the Town Forum and other key stakeholders;*
- *A ‘Simultaneous Multiple Attribute Trade-Off’ modelling (SIMALTO) exercise as part of the budget consultation process;*
- *The results of the triennial BVPI Customer Satisfaction survey;*
- *and Articles in the Borough Magazine – iLocal.*

We have been consulted in the past on documents which were of less importance to our Community than the Draft Strategic Plan. We became aware of this important document at last minute only and regret that we had no chance to do more research before commenting.

Further it is very difficult to answer to specific paragraphs as they are not numbered.

- We believe that TWBC has still a long way to go to properly consult with its residents and this very document proves the opposite of the exercise it intended to do.

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However, we also face significant challenges:

- *The high cost of housing, coupled with a significant gap between housing supply and needs means that there is a significant challenge in balancing the housing market.*
- *Whilst in overall terms the borough appears to be affluent, there are areas of deprivation. For example, within the borough there are areas ranked among the most deprived twenty percent in Kent and Medway and in these areas, life expectancy is on average three years less than the borough average.*
- *(1) The high cost of living makes it difficult to attract new people to the borough and adversely affects some of our vulnerable residents. It also makes it difficult for the Council to recruit and retain employees.*
- *(2) Tunbridge Wells town centre is reliant on the retail economy and in recent years has suffered a relative decline in retail rankings in the face of increasing competition elsewhere.*
- *The geography of the borough which can lead to increased costs and the need to promote equal access to services in rural and urban areas*
- *An ageing population: by 2016, over 20 percent of our total population will be over the age of 65.*
- *Engagement with BME and new communities is challenging due to the small numbers within the district.*
- *Ensuring we both reduce our local contribution to climate change and promote adaptation to the consequences of climate change.*

- (1) We found only recently out that it seems to be the practice of other Boroughs to use the private sector market to rent flats in the town centre to accommodate their social cases. This takes of course flats off the market for local people wishing to rent privately with own means as they fall into competition with these and other DSS cases. TWBC would need to exercise some kind of control over the situation as it certainly does not produce strong communities as promoted on page 14. Who is paying the Council tax for these cases?
- (2) It has to be taken into account that the decline happened not only due to competitive pressure alone, but as well to the lack of enforcement dealing with the major grot spot sites. Cinema site, Land behind Eridge Road Filling Station and the many other smaller deterrents have contributed to the negative visual appearance of the town.

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Our Four Corporate Priorities

1. *Promote and maintain a thriving and diverse local economy;*
2. *Care for our environment;*
3. *Have housing suitable for local people;*
4. *Develop safer and stronger communities.*

3. Same comment applicable as for page 9. – [We found only recently out that it seems to be the practice of other Boroughs to use the private sector market to rent flats in the town centre to accommodate their social cases. This takes of course flats off the market for local people wishing to rent privately with own means as they fall into competition with these and other DSS cases. TWBC would need to exercise some kind of control over the situation as it certainly does not produce strong communities as promoted on page 14. Who is paying the Council tax for these cases?]

4. How can you claim to make a community stronger if you tolerate the actual ‘Buy to let’ ghettos which are created by developing town houses into tiny flats of 500 sq ft or less with an occupancy of sometimes up to 6 people?

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Reducing Traffic Congestion

Average traffic flows in the borough are about twice the national average. Unsurprisingly, traffic and transport-related problems consistently top the list of residents’ concerns. The effect of the high volume of traffic on the condition of local roads is a matter of concern. The heavy traffic flows also cause increased noise and air pollution, as well as having an impact on road safety. It is essential that new development does not take place without adequate transport infrastructure, or at the very least a firm commitment to provide that transport infrastructure.

– and Page 18

Protection and Enhancement of Local Character

Retaining the quality of open spaces . . . pleasant residential areas . . . heritage . . . Conservation Areas . . . Listed Buildings

In observing a most recent case in our area: <http://www.telephonehouse.org.uk/opposite8yr/opposite8yr.html> a quote out of Goethe’s Faust “The message I do hear, but I lack the faith” would be a justified comment to this. It is not good enough to produce glossy text if TWBC is not prepared to adhere to the promises.

Improve the street scene

The negative impact of buildings like Cinema site as cancerous cells and the intrusions identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal by Alan Legg, already in 2000, are not solved with mopping up exercises. At the base were planning mistakes.

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Have housing suitable for local people

The comment we made for page 9 is again applicable: – [We found only recently out that it seems to be the practice of other Boroughs to use the private sector market to rent flats in the town centre to accommodate their social cases. This takes of course flats off the market for local people wishing to rent privately with own means as they fall into competition with these and other DSS cases. TWBC would need to exercise some kind of control over the situation as it certainly does not produce strong communities as promoted on page 14. Who is paying the Council tax for these cases?]

There seems as well to be a lack of inspection of dwellings falling under the Licensing Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) as required under the Housing Act 2004.

Further, many of the earmarked sites in the adopted Local Plan are still not developed; hence all these dwellings did not come in time onto the market.

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Community Engagement and Development

In order to help local communities to be self-reliant and thriving, we will be developing Neighbourhood Action Plans throughout the borough. This will help ensure that residents' needs are reflected in how our partners and we deliver and improve services. We want to help communities prioritise for themselves and lever funds into their area. This is not just Council spending, but building capacity to seek Government and other agency funding.

Work with and consult the community to identify the improvements which will most benefit local residents. This year we will: Pilot a program of community engagement led by local Ward Members

This approach is greatly welcomed by our association and we would look forward to co-operating.

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Our Three Customer Service Commitments

We are missing the commitment to take ideas, comments and the local knowledge of residents effectively into projects.

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Delivery – Internal Capacity

• *New Sustainable Community Plan in place*

The Community Plan itself was not the focus of our critic at the time, but the Action Plan it called, had not taken in any views of residents!