

AGENDA

Thursday 16 November 2023 at 6pm
At the Council Chamber, Town Hall

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. Attendance

Members are asked to sign the attendance sheet on arrival. A draft attendance list will then be circulated after the meeting. Please advise the Secretary of any errors or omissions in the draft list.

2. Register of Members

3. Voting Entitlement for Member Organisations and Councillors

4. Minutes of the 2022 AGM

(The minutes of the 2022 AGM were noted at the meeting on 30 March 2023 and are attached here for formal approval.)

5. Chair's Annual Report

6. Election of Officers

Motion: It is proposed that a joint adhoc group (TWBC and RTW TF) is formed to review the relationship between TWBC and RTW TF, to look at the way forward and to recommend changes for effective communication and working.

(See supporting papers for background to this motion.)

ORDINARY MEETING

7. Membership Changes

- a. Changes of representatives (includes Rotary and Access Group)
- b. New membership applications

8. Minutes of the meeting 13 July 2023

- a. Approval as a correct record
- b. Matters arising

9. Updates from Member Organisations, written if possible

(Please advise the Secretary before the meeting if you wish to raise a topic under this agenda item.)

10. Changes at Royal Victoria Place

Introduction by Ben Chapelard, Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Cllr Justine Rutland, Cabinet member for Economic Development.

Presentation by Sabri Marsaoui from Rivington Hark, the new Asset Managers at RVP

11. Update from the Borough Council

Update from Cllr Justine Rutland, Cabinet Member for Economic Development

12. RTW Town Forum going forward: modernising

Follow up from discussions on communications at previous meeting: new ways of operating, outreach, embracing technology. Points of contact with Council. Contacts with Councillors.

Responding to actual and potential changes to political structures. See notes and discussion points in attached Agenda papers.

13. Reports from the Town Forum Working Groups

- a. Strategic Planning Working Group
- b. Transport Strategy Working Group includes Better Streets Initiative
- c. Leisure, Wellbeing and Culture Working Group
- d. Finance and Other Issues Working Group, includes new group membership, Special Expenses and possible TF budget.
- e. Water in the Wells Working Group

14. Urgent Business or Topics for Future Meetings

15. Future Meetings

Dates to be arranged



AGENDA 2

Register of Members

The table below sets out the various membership Organisations and their nominated and substitute representatives, where available, and the Councillor members which make up the body of the Town Forum as at 12 October 2023.

Please notify the Secretary as soon as possible of any errors or changes.

Member Organisations

Association/Group	Primary Representative	Substitute
Banner Farm Residents' Association	Diana Butler	Veronika Segall-Jones
Benhall Mill Road Land Association	Altan Omer	Ken Norman
Beulah Road Residents' Association	Stuart Anderson	Chris Morris
Boyne Park Residents' Association	Sue Bishop	Dorothea Holman
Calverley Park Crescent Association	Stuart Macdonald	none
Calverley Park Gardens Residents' Association	Sue Diales	none
Calverley Park Residents' Association	Jane Fenwick	none
Camden Park Residents' Association	Tim Harper	Sally Manning
Camden Road Guild	Sue Kaner	none
Civic Society of RTW	Brian Lippard	John de Lucy
Clarence Road Users' Association	Alec Taylor	Paul Sinclair
COCA (Camden Hill, Oakfield Court Road and Cambridge Gardens Residents' Association)	Sue Pound	Tony Miller
Culverden Residents' Association	Mark Booker	Michael Lees
Dudley Road Residents' Association	Jenina Bas-Pendry	Big Bilski

Member Organisations (continued)

Association/Group	Primary Representative	Substitute
Friends @ The Amelia Scott	John Mitcham	Helen Mitcham
Friends of Calverley Grounds	Rebecca Dodsworth	Lisa Grant
Friends of Grosvenor & Hilbert Parks	David Barnett	none
Friends of Hawkenbury Recreation Ground	Valerie Le Moignan	Pamela Lock
Friends of The Commons	Joy Podbury	Clive Evans
Friends of The Grove	Tim Tempest	Joanna Anderson
Friends of Trinity Churchyard	Charles Pope	none
Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery	John de Lucy	none
Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery	Margaret Ginman	David Bushell
Grantley Court Residents Association	Lorna Blackmore	none
Grove Hill House Residents' Association	Robert Chris	Ingrid Pope
Hawkenbury Village Association	Geoff Shewry	none
Inner London Road Residents' Association	Carol Wilson	Pat Wilson
Kingswood Residents' Association	Adrian Johnson	none
Molyneux Park Gardens Residents Association	Don Sloan	Mark Lavenstein
Nevill Court Roads Committee	David Kershaw	none
Nourish Community Foodbank	Dawn Stanford	Lesley Darcy
Poona Road Residents' Association	Laura Gibson	Olivia Thornhill
Ramslye Residents	Adrian Thorne	Noreen O'Meara
Residents' First	Chris Stevenson	none
Rotary Club of Tunbridge Wells (new in 2021/22)	John Taylor	David Wilson
Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom	Katharina Mahler-Bech	none
Royal Tunbridge Wells Together	Alex Green	none
Royal Wells Park Residents' Group (new in 2021/22)	Paul Bright	Helen Walton

Member Organisations (continued)

Association/Group	Primary Representative	Substitute
Sherborne Close Management Committee	Marianne MacDonald	None
Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District	Caroline Auckland	Angela McPherson
St John's Road Residents' Association	Marguerita Morton	Tony Mole
Telephone House Neighbours' Association	Katharina Mahler-Bech	none
The Avenues Residents' Association	Tim Tempest	none
The Forum	Carolyn Gray	Jason Dormon
The Potteries Residents' and Owners Group (new in 2021/22)	David Scott	Michael Paynter
Trinity Theatre	Nick Mowatt	None
Tunbridge Wells Access Group	Andy England	none
Tunbridge Wells Anti-Aircraft Noise Group (TWAANG)	Irene Fairbairn	Angus Stewart
Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group	Adrian Berendt	Paul Mason
Tunbridge Wells Business Forum	Allan Gooda	Nicholas Kelly
Tunbridge Wells Dementia Friendly Community	Jocelyn Cheek	Christine Parker
Tunbridge Wells Fairtrade Town Group (new in 2021/22)	Mandy Flashman-Wells	Jacqueline Franklin
Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth	Marieke de Jonge	Steve Walter
Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum	Denise Watts	Ruth Chambers
Tunbridge Wells Puppetry Festival	Matthew Brown	Ailsa Molyneux
Tunbridge Wells Repair Café	Chris Murphy	none
Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association	Michael Holman	David Wakefield
Tunbridge Wells U3A (IN ABEYANCE)	n/a	n/a
Upper Stone Street Residents' Association	Helen Featherstone	none
Warwick Park Residents' Association	Neil Williams	Andrew Hempleman

Councillor Members

Ward	Member	Member	Member
Broadwater	Christopher Hall	Jamie Johnson	n/a
Culverden	Martin Brice	David Osborne	Justine Rutland
Pantiles & St. Mark's	Gavin Barrass	Wendy Fitzsimmons	Pamela Wilkinson
Park	Siobhan O'Connell	Nicholas Pope	Victoria White
Sherwood	Lance Goodship	Hugo Pound	Shadi Rogers
St. James'	Ben Chapelard	Rob Wormington	n/a
St. John's	Mark Ellis	Peter Lidstone	Marguerita Morton



Voting Entitlement for Member Organisations and Councillors

Paragraph 3.1.2 of the Constitution requires that “In order to vote at the AGM or any EGM the named representative of a members organisation or their substitute shall have attended at least 50 percent of possible meeting that could have been attended in the previous 12 months. This percentage shall be pro-rata for organisations joining part-way through the year.”

Similarly, paragraph 3.1.4 of the Constitution requires that “Councillor members shall be eligible to vote at the AGM and any EGM if they have attended at least 50 percent of possible meeting that could have been attended in the previous 12 months. This percentage shall be pro-rata for councillors elected and joining part-way through the year.”

Five full meetings have been held in the relevant period: 24 November 2022, 19 January 2023, 30 March 2023 and 13 July 2023. The meeting scheduled for 14 September was cancelled.

Member Organisations who have attended at least 50% of possible meetings:

Beulah Road Residents' Association
Boyne Park Residents' Association
Calverley Park Residents' Association
Civic Society of Royal Tunbridge Wells
Culverden Residents' Association*
Friends @ The Amelia Scott
Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Park
Friends of The Grove
Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery
Grantley Court Residents Association
Inner London Road Residents' Association
Molyneux Park Gardens
Sorooptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District
The Avenues Residents' Association
Tunbridge Wells Bicycle Users Group
Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association
Upper Stone Street Residents' Association
Warwick Park Residents' Association

AGENDA 4



**Minutes of the AGM held on Thursday, 24 November 2022, at 6pm
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS**

ATTENDANCE

- 1 Member Organisations:
Beulah Road Residents' Association – Stuart Anderson and Chris Morris | Boyne Park Residents' Association – Sue Bishop and Dorothea Holman | Calverley Park Residents' Association – Jane Fenwick | Civic Society of Royal Tunbridge Wells – John de Lucy | Friends @ The Amelia Scott – Helen Mitcham | Friends of Grosvenor & Hilbert Parks – David Barnett | Friends of The Grove and The Avenues Residents' Association – Tim Tempest | Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery – John de Lucy | Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery – David Bushell | Grantley Court Residents Association – Lorna Blackmore | Inner London Road Residents' Association – Carol Wilson | Molyneux Park Gardens Residents' Association – Don Sloan | Nourish Community Foodbank and Sherbourne Close Management Committee – Marianne MacDonald | Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District – Caroline Auckland and Cat Mennell | St John's Road Residents' Association – Marguerita Morton | The Forum – Carolyn Gray | Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group – Adrian Berendt | Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth – Steve Walter | Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association – Michael Holman | Upper Stone Street Residents' Association – Helen Featherstone | Warwick Park Residents' Association – Neil Williams.

Councillor Members:
Culverden ward – Cllr Justine Rutland | Pantiles and St. Mark's ward – Cllr Wendy Fitzsimmons | Park ward – Cllr Victoria White | St. John's ward – Cllr Peter Lidstone and Cllr Marguerita Morton.

Others in Attendance:
Borough Council Officers – Terry Hughes (Community Safety Manager) | Guests – Insp Ian Jones (Kent Police), Jill Ruddock, Angela McPherson, Oliver Diggins, Roz Heaton. Thomas Appleby, Jayne Sharratt | Secretary – Mark O'Callaghan.

REGISTER OF MEMBERS

- 2 The Secretary returned the list of members of the Town Forum as set out in the agenda.

VOTING ENTITLEMENT FOR MEMBER ORGANISATIONS AND COUNCILLORS

- 3 The Secretary confirmed that the voting entitlement of those who had achieved the required level of attendance was as set out in the agenda.

MINUTES OF THE 2021 AGM

- 4 The Chair noted that the minutes had been agreed in principle at the meeting in January 2022 but were submitted here for formal approval.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the AGM held on 11 November 2021 be approved.

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT

- 5 The Chair summarised the annual report which highlighted the breadth and depth of activities the Town Forum had in their busy year.

Extra meetings were held such as the Forum Focus on 12 May 2022 which looked at the Forum's activities and ways it could function more effectively, virtual meetings for the local elections were held and those may be held as hybrid sessions going forward.

During the year the Forum was involved with more partnerships with the Borough Council which had been set up throughout the year and those included the town centre area plan, cooperation on Ukrainian refugees, the cost of living crisis and the shared prosperity levelling up.

Transport and active travel were highlighted.

It was confirmed that the Town Forum was supporting the Council to achieve its carbon neutrality objective by 2030.

There were 4 new members confirmed and those were:

- The Royal Wells Park Residents Group
- The Potteries Residents and Owners Group
- Tunbridge Wells Fair Trade Group
- Rotary Club of Tunbridge Wells

Attendance was named as an issue as that had dropped by 10 per cent.

Town Hall Space Limited were named as the consultants for the Town Hall co working.

Thanks was given to working groups for the amount of work they put in and they were considered to be were the backbone and drivers to the Town Forum.

Thanks to the Borough Council for their help at facilitating the meetings and in particular to the Secretary Mark O'Callaghan for all his support.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- 6 The Secretary introduced the report and confirmed that nominations had been received as set out in the agenda.

The Secretary confirmed that the constitution allowed for two Deputy Chairs.

No challenges to the provisional result were received therefore it was declared that the votes cast were as follows:

- Don Sloan, Chair: Unanimous
- Adrian Berendt, Deputy Chair: Unanimous
- Jane Fenwick, Deputy Chair: Unanimous

The Chair thanked for his position and advised that they would do what they could in the coming year. Members of the Forum were invited to

join working parties if they were minded.

RESOLVED:

1. That Don Sloan be elected Chair for 2022/23 until the date of the AGM 2023; and
2. That Adrian Berendt be elected Deputy Chair for 2022/23 until the date of the AGM 2023;
and
3. That Jane Fenwick be elected Deputy Chair for 2022/23 until the date of the AGM 2023.

The Chair ended the Annual General Meeting and passed over to the Secretary who continued with the general meeting as per agenda.

AGENDA 5

RTW Town Forum Chairman's Report 2022 – 2023

At our first meeting immediately following the AGM in November 2022 we had a full agenda as usual; this time with presentations on Safety in Tunbridge Wells, the environment, the Electoral Arrangements consultation for our Borough and the Cost of Living Crisis. We also had our regular Update from Cllr Justine Rutland. We report on some of these topics below.

RTW Town Forum has continued to be a source of community action responding to issues and problems in the town, and in urging appropriate action. We have participated in Council Partnership Groups, responded to consultations and have updated our information sheet summarising our outputs and achievements over recent years.

Meetings

We held meetings as follows:

24 November 2022 (AGM followed by regular meeting)

19 January 2023

30 March 2023 (virtual meeting)

25 May 2023

13 July 2023

There was just the one virtual meeting in the last 12 months, while in the previous year in the aftermath of Covid we only had one face to face meeting (the Forum Focus) meeting.

The final meeting of the current (22-23) year scheduled for 14 September had to be cancelled due to the Council Chamber being needed for other purposes, and the unavailability of Council staff to host a virtual meeting.

Council Support

Secretarial support and provision of space for our meetings by TWBC has

increasingly been an issue during the year. Towards the end of 2022 we lost the invaluable secretarial support from Mark O’Callaghan who moved to another local authority. Louise Kellam took over and provided considerable support both for full meetings and for management meetings, though there were limitations on her time. We also had help from Emer Moran, Renee Dillon and Caroline Britt.

At that time it was becoming apparent that the Council had constraints on staffing and space for meetings. In April we received confirmation from William Benson that the Council was looking to reduce its occupancy of the Town Hall by two thirds and to sub-let the remaining space to Town Square Spaces to provide co-working space for local residents and businesses. It was further indicated that the Council was facing both acute financial pressure and pressure on its staffing capacity as a result of challenges in recruiting staff, and this applied nationally.

Since then we have had a couple of meetings with CEO William Benson and we now understand that these constraints are easing, but we may still be required to take on more management and secretarial responsibilities. In recent months this has been found rather demanding on some of our management group, though we may be able to further share responsibilities. This has yet to be discussed by our full membership and resolved with the Council.

However, it was helpful that we were recently given access our mailing list so we can now send out messages directly to our members.

Councillor Convention

In May the Council held a Councillor Convention to set the scene for the preparation of a new Strategic Plan. At the invitation of the Council’s CEO, William Benson, our Chairman presented a paper at the event on the challenges that are likely to be faced in developing such a plan. After that, Councillors were divided into groups for brainstorming sessions, chaired by Council officers, in order to consider possible ways forward in key activity sectors.

Consultation, Engagement and Participation

Some of our members had felt for some time that the Council, while periodically offering formal public consultations on matters of concern, was not engaging sufficiently on a regular basis to explain its thinking and to encourage public interest, as in a vision and plan for the town centre.

Members had wondered whether the Town Forum could also be more active in this respect. However, it was acknowledged that the Council engages with *stakeholders* through its *partnership groups* in which the TF has participated. Some are reported on below.

At our July meeting when this topic was on the agenda Brian Lippard (Civic Society) presented a survey that asked members present to assess their level of engagement with TWBC using the established method developed by

Sherry Arnstein - *'The Ladder of Citizen Participation'*.

He argued that while local government does give people a voice there is no agreement on how 'engagement' can be effective. He asked how, representing our own organisations, we consult with them. This is all particularly relevant at this time when the *Town Forum is reviewing its own ways of working and interactions/communications with its members and the public.*

Cooperation with businesses

We have had several meetings and discussions with Alex Green the new Director of Together for Tunbridge Wells (BID) which is one of our members. He informed us of a meeting of Pantiles businesses he was arranging to discuss walkways there, and issues of access. Our Deputy Chair, Jane Fenwick was able to attend and contribute to the meeting.

We'll be supporting BID's recently announced new A26 Cycle Path initiative. We've been pressing for a cycle path there for several years. We are also encouraging our members to support a Box Art project, which BID is sponsoring, and has the backing of Refresh Tunbridge Wells. The project is for the painting of telephone and other junction boxes around town with attractive artwork, improving the street scene.

Electoral arrangements consultation and final recommendations

In May the Local Government Boundaries Commission for England (LGBCE) published their final recommendations for our borough (<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/tunbridge-wells>).

This followed their consultation which we had responded to last year. They noted our concerns over anomalies for High Brooms (partly in and out of Southborough) and have remedied it. The Commission has also adopted our suggestions of using the already familiar names for the redrawn inner wards: Culverden, St John's, St James', Sherwood, Park, and Pantiles.

There was a concern that Tunbridge Wells town might have been underrepresented, had they taken a different approach to the rural areas. This turned out *not* to be the case.

Council Partnership groups

We have continued to participate in partnership groups set up by the Borough Council to take forward projects or respond to particular needs. The idea is to involve stakeholders by getting their views, suggestions and other help as appropriate. Members of the groups have typically included RTW Town Forum, Councillors, voluntary organisations, Parish Chairs, and others.

In particular we have contributed to:

Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) – This is part of Levelling Up. A number of modest projects we had proposed last year were absorbed into larger projects this year, following Government approval of the Council's investment plan. Tunbridge Wells is benefitting from grants to improvements

to the Street Scene in the north of the town (RTW Street Scene Improvements), Creative Tunbridge Wells to grow the creative and business economy, and Visit Tunbridge Wells Marketing Plan for which a brochure has been produced for the Tunbridge Wells and the wider borough. Follow-up improvements to the High Street, including street furniture are being introduced. In the current year support is being given to reintroduce the Royal Tunbridge Wells Farmers Market. Our Chairman continues to represent the Town Forum on this partnership group.

Town Centre Area Plan – We have been represented on this partnership by Chair and Deputy Chair (Adrian Berendt) since its inception last year, and several of our members have participated in stakeholder workshops. We receive regular updates on the plan at partnership meetings, and have commented on questions proposed for a public Issues and Options consultation due to take place early next year. There have also been discussions following the Council's recent call for Town Centre sites for potential development. Particular attention is being given to the Council's work with BID on an Economic Development Strategy and on an emerging Vision (with the underlying principles) for the town.

Our Town Forum efforts have continued to be directed at providing information on the evolving plan and keeping our members interested. As regards the former, detailed presentations were given at our full TF meetings by Carlos Hone, TWBC Head of Planning and Cllr Hugo Pound.

We have also been urging the Council to give careful consideration when introducing the coming consultation on their proposals for the town centre to *how* the Vision can be best explained to the public and how to encourage criticism and comments, as well as showing themselves still open to new suggestions at this stage.

See also *Strategic Planning Working Group* below.

Environment

At the meeting on 24 November last year following the AGM Radu Lepure Caroles from the Environment Agency showed a video on Carbon Data and explained the work of the Agency.

At a more recent meeting Marieke de Jonge Town Forum member and Local Coordinator for Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth gave advice on how we can personally reduce our carbon footprints.

Membership and attendance

There were no new member organisations this year. We have 60 membership organisations comprising 20 special interest groups and 40 residents' associations.

The average attendance rate has dropped again this year. A number of organisations appear to have let their membership lapse by not attending any meetings, and we'll need to find the reasons for this and advise on appropriate action.

	Average attendance including Councillors	Average attendance excluding Councillors (member organisations only)
2022/23	37%	33%
2021/22	42%	45%
2020/21 (covid continues until May 2021)	57%	60%
2019/20 (covid from March 2020 onwards)	52%	56%
2018/19	Not recorded	62%

Cinema Site

We have received regular briefings on the Cinema site and we are informed that work on the site is due to start early in 2024

Safety in Tunbridge Wells

This was reviewed in some detail at our full meeting on 24 November which followed our AGM. Caroline Auckland, Soroptimist International Tunbridge Wells and District

outlined the findings of their survey on safety issues faced by women in Tunbridge Wells.

This was a great opportunity for members to put their concerns and questions to a panel comprising:

Terry Hughes, Community Safety Manager, TWBC

Roz Heaton, Business Crime Manager, Town Safety Partnership

Inspector Jones, Kent Police

Gill Ruddock, Soroptimists.

This was further reported on in the minutes of the meeting of 24 November which appeared in the agenda papers for our March 30th meeting.

Town Forum Working Groups

Our working groups are our backbone. Without them our impact and effectiveness would be lost. The groups have continued to produce reports, disseminate information and monitor Council and other proposals and plans.

Leisure, Wellbeing and Culture

As previously reported Carolyn Gray needed to step back from chairing last year. Members of the group had a busy year personally and so found they could only meet once during the year.

At the informal meeting on 19 June the Group reviewed of all that had happened in the past year regarding The Pantiles spring, Pantiles events; the

Decimus Burton Museum project; The Amelia Scott; The Assembly Hall; Trinity Theatre; The Forum, the Town Hall; the Local Plan, including Hawkenbury Sports Centre and TW Football Club; and finally local parks funding, including RTW In Bloom. Some of these are reported on under the other working groups

The working group feels it needs “new blood” to take it forward, and would welcome anyone willing to take on Chairing, also a secretary to take and type the minutes, and new members with an interest in the future of the town’s leisure, wellbeing and culture.

Water in the Wells group:

The group maintained a watch on established water features, reporting non-functioning ones to the relevant authorities when necessary. The greatest concern had been with the water feature at The Potteries (Pantiles 1887) which has frequently been without water. At the time of writing it appears to be functioning with lights working and water flowing.

The most significant development over the year was the reformation of the Chalybeate Spring and Dippers Hall. Although not all working group members were happy with the result, one member gave regular support and advice to the businessman who conceived, financed and realized the project. After many years of neglect, not only does the right-hand basin have a small gushing fountain, but modified chalybeate water, bottled and in a variety of flavours is on sale. We now have water in several forms at either end of the Pantiles.

Another notable development has been the restoration of the vandalized Joseph Love Fountain in St John’s Park and Meadows. Members of the Working Group came together with the Friends of the Park and the Council Parks Department to bring the project to a successful conclusion, marked by an official opening by the Mayor in June.

The working group has continued to lobby the TWBC Parks Department to install more bottle-filling stations. Bottle filling stations have been installed in several more public parks, including Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, The Grove and St John’s Park and Meadows. The group is currently liaising with the Director of the Business Improvement District (BID) to investigate where bottle filling stations might be installed in the town centre.

For developments still at the pre-construction phase and those already nearing completion, members have maintained contact with Retirement Villages (the developer of the former ABC Cinema site) and with Elysian (the developer of the former Bus Depot – now renamed ‘The Beckett’) to ensure that the water features included in plans are actually installed. In both cases the working group has been assured that the envisaged water walls remain firmly in the plan..

The group continues to lobby the Council and the Parks Department to produce a long-term plan for the renovation and maintenance of the

Dunorlan Victorian Fountain with its attendant cascades and channels.

Finance Working Group.

After many years of excellent, diligent work leading the Finance Working Group, David Wakefield handed over the reins and David Scott has kindly agreed to chair the group.

At the end of last year a response was submitted to the *budget* consultation for 2023-2024.

The usual task of reviewing the annual budget and actuals of the Borough Council for 2022-2023 proved to be more challenging than usual. The working group has recently provided a commentary/report with analyses of the Council's annual accounts for the last financial year which are of some complexity. The complexities result from the usual frequent short notice of changes of government policy with regard to council funding, and this time there have been particular uncertainties induced by the Covid pandemic. For many of us the Working Group report has helped to explain the accounts and untangle the complexities.

The working group also spent some time examining Special Expenses - the 'precept' paid by resident members of the Town Forum - and will continue to investigate the process for deciding which town amenities it funds, mainly the town's parks.

The very recent news about TWBC buying British Land out of their lease on Royal Victoria Place has yet to be fully digested, but will surely have a significant impact on council finances in future years.

On all these items, the group is grateful to Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, and colleagues for their time and cooperation in what has been a busy time for them. We look forward to further cooperation next year.

Finally, more volunteers are welcome, indeed needed, on the Finance Working Group in what is likely to prove an equally challenging year for local councils throughout the UK in 2023/24

The Strategic Planning Working Group

The group, efficiently chaired and managed by Mark Booker, has had another very busy year with the Local Plan and has responded to consultations and to questions raised by Government inspectors/examiners. Mark is looking for someone to take over from him.

As far as the general public are concerned the Draft Local Plan will appear to have made little progress since the Public Inquiry into the draft closed last November. This reflects the extreme difficulty which seems to be facing the Planning Policy Team and their consultants in satisfying the Inspector that the various aspects of the proposed Garden Village at Tudeley can be adequately co-ordinated and implemented within the proposed delivery time.

The Working Group has great sympathy for officers faced with unrealistic and

often moving planning targets from central government and having little autonomy actually to plan what should be done to meet the Borough's actual needs. Proposed Major Modifications to the draft were finally due to be announced at the beginning of October but the Cabinet Advisory Board meeting on 9th October was cancelled, presumably because there are still some unresolved issues. The next possible date for public information will be the Cabinet Advisory Board on 13th November.

The Working Group has also monitored and commented on the Town Centre Area Plan which is reported on separately above.

Transport Working Group

Jane Fenwick chairs our *Transport Working Group*. This year the group largely focussed on supporting ideas to promote more 'active travel' so as to reduce pollution and benefit the health and wellbeing of people living and working in the town, while also recognising that it is important to have a viable and affordable range of transport options for all types of journey.

Actions taken include the following:

- Proposing a 'whole town' 20mph scheme for local councillors to consider.
- Giving support to making the High Street one way scheme permanent. The Group also called for improved planters, wider pavements and other design improvements. Lorna Blackmore conducted a survey of retailers views and presented the result to the Joint Transportation Board meeting.
- Supporting the BID (Business Improvement District) in their attempt to secure funding for the design of new cycle routes from Rusthall using some Commons land, and pedestrian and cycle improvement in the St John's/St James residential area.

There is concern that double decker buses are still parking on London Road and around the town all day after transporting children from around Kent and Sussex to local schools. The main bus stand was always full so that tourist coaches could not stop, and views of the Commons were blighted. We continue to support local residents in urging the TWBC to find alternative locations for all this bus and coach traffic. So far no solution has been proposed.

The Mount Pleasant 'bus gate' scheme in front of the Amelia Centre and Town Hall (also affecting residents of York Road and Dudley Road) had been operational for some time before it was finally enforced this year. It resulted in many complaints, confusion and anger at fines imposed. Our Transport Working Group had alerted TWBC to the inadequate and confused signage when it was first opened but drivers had got used to driving through without enforcement. As a result there has been difficulty in changing driving habits to enforce the scheme. Local residents most affected are very unhappy and continue to press for solutions. TWG members helped with traffic counts in the area.

Town Forum management

Our thanks go to the Council for the support they were able to provide us during the year in the face of staffing difficulties and issues related to

planning for co-working. (See Council Support above).

Thanks to all those who have supported us during the year. I am especially grateful to our management group and to chairs of working groups and all who have served on them.

Thanks also to Katharina Mahler-Bech who has continued to efficiently manage our website and social media, providing vital sources of communication for our organisation.

Finally, despite the problems over the current year of reduced Council administrative support and difficulties over arrangements for meetings we have, as outlined above, continued make significant inputs through our members, Working Groups and management group towards improvements in Tunbridge Wells.

Don Sloan OBE,
Chairman RTW Town Forum
October, 2023

AGENDA 6

Election of Officers

Nominations were invited in line with our current RTW TF Constitution. In the current impasse no nominations were received.

Change is envisaged for our working relationship with the Council. The issues and difficulties are covered in the Chair's Annual Report, Agenda item 5 above, and can be explored further. We are hopeful that a greater degree of Council secretarial and admin support can be restored.

Our TF Management team propose the formation of an adhoc group to explore with the Council the way forward, before again requesting nominations which could be considered at a future EGM. An appropriate motion can be considered at the meeting.

For the interim Adrian Berendt is willing to lead such a group, and Don Sloan (current TF chair) and some or all of the current Management Group would be happy to join with others.



AGENDA 8

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RTW TOWN FORUM

held on 13TH JULY 2023 in the Town Hall

1 Attendance

Dave Barnett (Friends of Grosvenor & Hilbert Park); Paul Mason (Royal Tunbridge Wells Bike User Group); Mark Booker (Culverden RA); Ruth Chambers (Tunbridge Wells Older People's Forum); Stuart Anderson, (Beulah Road RA); Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Association); Susan Bishop (Boyne Park RA); Brian Lippard (RTW Civic Society); Mike Trudel (Friends of the Amelia Scott); David Scott (The Potteries Residents' and Owners Group); Don Sloan (Chair and Molyneaux Park Residents' Association); Margaret Ginman (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery); Katharina Mahler-Bech (RTW in Bloom); Caroline Auckland and Catherine Mennell, (Sroptimist International TW District); Neil Williams (Warwick Park RA);

Councillor members: Justine Rutland (Culverden), Siobhan O'Connell (Park), Ben Chapelard (St James).

TWBC officers: Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, and Adrea Rubio, Economic Development Manager

Apologies: Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents Association); Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association); Carolyn Gray (The Forum); Joy Podbury (Friends of the Commons); Tim Tempest (Friends of The Grove and The Avenues RA); Lorna Blackmore (Grantley Court RA); Robert Chris, (Grove Hill House RA); Adrian Berendt (TWBUG).

Cllr members: Rob Warmington (St James) Marguerita Morton and Peter Lidstone and Mark Ellis (St Johns); Nick Pope (Park)

2 Membership Changes – Cllr Siobhan O'Connell was welcomed to the Forum following her election to Park ward.

a) **Changes of representatives** – Alex Green, BID director and formerly a vice chair of the Town Forum will represent BID.

b) **New membership applications** - None

3 Minutes of the meetings dated 25 May 2023 - approved as a correct record; No matters arising.

Agenda changes: Dan Colborne's presentation on the Commons is deferred to a later date. Agenda item 5: Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager, will provide an update on the 'Better Streets' project St John's and St James wards. Agenda item 4: Brian Lippard's item on Consultation and Engagement'

4 Engagement Questionnaire: (Attached)

Brian Lippard (Civic Society) presented a survey questionnaire (attached) that asked members present to assess their involvement in consultations with TWBC using the established method developed by Sherry Arnstein - '*The Ladder of Citizen Participation*'. He suggested that members felt

involvement in various TWBC consultations was often ineffective. He asked what do we understand is the difference between consultation, engagement or participation to be?

The Ladder of Participation provides a logical 'ladder' ranging from minimal provision of information to citizens at the bottom rung but 'no participation', through to 'tokenism' with more information, consultation and use of placation, through to 'citizen' power enabling those involved to come up with ideas, work in partnership, have some delegated power and ultimately citizen control.

He argued that local government does give people a voice but there is no agreement on how 'engagement' can be effective. He cited recent 'consultation' by TWBC including designing the Amelia Scott, the Calverley Square project, repurposing the Town Hall and the redesign of Showfields estate. More recently the TWBC had utilised its Talking Point online programme. He asked how, as representatives of our own organisations, do we consult with them?

The results of the survey are below on slides 19-24 (and attached).

Talking Point awareness			
• TWBC	Yes	Seven	No None
• Town Forum	Yes	Eleven	No One

19

Talking Point: How many times used			
• TWBC	Twice	One person	More than twice: Six people
• Town Forum	Zero	Two people	
	Once	Two people	
	Twice	Two people	
	More than twice	Six people	

20

Ladder no. TWBC consultations in last 5 years			
Ladder rung	TWBC No. of people	Town Forum No. of people	
1	-	One	
2	One	-	
3	One	One	
3-4	One	Two	
4	Two	Five	
4&6	-	One	
1-6	One	-	
6	One	-	
		(2 didn't answer)	

21

Ladder No. On the Town Centre Plan to date			
Ladder rung	TWBC No. of people	Town Forum No. of people	
2-3	-	One	
3	One	Five	
3-4	One	One	
4	One	Four	
6	Three	One	
8	One	-	

22

Ladder No. Hoped for level of future consultation on the Town Centre Plan			
Ladder rung	TWBC No. of people	Town Forum No. of people	
4	-	One	
5	One	One	
6	Six	Nine	
6,7 or 8	-	One	

23

Should a Town Forum member join a working group if s/he has to agree to confidentiality?	
• All bar one person said they should	

24

5. **Better Streets:** Hilary Smith, TWBC Economic Development Manager and Andrea Rubio, Economic Development Officer.

Hilary Smith explained that the aim of consultation is to get the views of residents in St John's and St James wards and to involve them in developing the answers to the traffic related issues in their local streets and how better to support journeys on foot and bike. The Local Cycling and Walking infrastructure plans prepared in 2018 for the Local Plan highlighted these areas - and some surrounding streets - for potential enhancement to reduce traffic related issues.

Funding comes from KCC via Active Travel England which has allocated £50,000 for the project design. This stage includes setting up a working group of officers, councillors, some Town Forum members and local residents from the area. An overall approach was agreed with KCC to start the project with early community engagement so that local people do not feel that solutions are 'imposed' on them. The engagement focusses on an online survey and interactive map on TWBC's consultation platform, Talking Points. People are asked to identify on an interactive map the key issues of concern, and the specific areas and locations which they feel are difficult or unsafe. They are invited to offer their ideas for improvements which will make the area a nicer place in which to live.

Andrea Rubio advised that Talking Point offered a short survey of 3-4 questions with the focal point being the interactive map with location pins. Other questions appear on screen asking how they feel about the location pinned. There is then a choice of options to highlight the problems and suggested solutions. By 12th May 400 responses had been mapped, and the survey has been extended to 15th July.

Analysis revealed data on where people live, the % of people who walk (50%), cycle, drive (40%), bus through the area and for journeys to school or work. Issues raised include parking- on both sides of the road and on pavements; and pollution, lack of greenery, narrow roads, overgrown vegetation, roads difficult to cross, rat runs and speeding traffic - all now marked by the pins street by street.

Analysis has highlighted the main problems and linked to suggested solutions for *improving the street environment* - such as planting trees, installing planters, benches and providing more places to sit, and to limit car access; *increasing safety* - by reducing vehicle speeds and lower speed limits, more pedestrian crossings at junctions, reduced through traffic; *inconsiderate parking* - to reduce on street parking, enforce parking rules and remove pavement parking

Next steps are to feedback results so far to KCC, and then appoint consultants with good experience in the community engagement element of designing liveable neighbourhoods. There will be further engagement with the local community to work up ideas and offer a range of solutions to the community to consider in another round of consultation. The working group and steering group will continue. The current funds not enough to implement agreed schemes but these will form the basis for further funding bids..

Q: Ruth Chalmers asked about engagement with older people and access groups about using alternatives to online survey methods. **A:** The access group has not been directly involved in the working group but there were paper copies of the survey, leaflets and help available at the Town Hall or Amelia Scott. **Q:** Did the survey ask for ages: **A:** Yes.

Q: Paul Mason: The next stages of action could be a low traffic neighbourhood scheme of some kind but the political environment for these schemes is not good since the Secretary of State for transport said recently that no new money will be given for LTNs. So how will this work translate into action. **A:** This engagement work will be used to bid for funding from Active Travel England. We are aware of negative publicity around LTNs which is why we not using that term. This is genuinely and open

consultation to see what local people want to identify their issues, one of which is thought to be through and speeding traffic. It may have some LTNs characteristics but this will give people a better walking and cycling experience. The High Street project started as a pilot scheme to try out how one-way flow would work. This used the Covid Emergency Active Travel fund.

Q. Jane Fenwick: Is the response of 400 (so far) a reasonable statistical return on the 7000 people living in the area. **A:** It is good response but the engagement system but the deadline has been extended.

Q: Neil Williams: Is spending money on consultants the way forward? Could this project be a 'template' for other areas in future. **A;** Professional expertise is needed to design solutions particularly where circulation of traffic is involved and public safety. However, we hope that this project is effectively a pilot and other areas could be considered similarly.

Q: Caroline Auckland: There are currently planning applications along London Road which will inevitably result in building workers and residents needing overflow parking in the St John's area. **A:** It is helpful to know that and I will follow that up.

Q: Stuart Anderson: We have found that forming a Whats App group for our road's residents improves communication and discussion about various current issues. The Town Forum could consider a similar group to improve communication and discussion with its members and the wider public beyond residents associations and their representatives. A wider range of views would be included if the Town Forum is a 'conduit' to reach individual people as well as interested groups. This has been the first council engagement that has generated a conversation on the street and this is useful. He suggested that when the data is provided to the consultants it should also reflect the priorities of the locals for the various issues raised?

Q. Cllr Rutland: Advised that any emails received are included in the data and if planning applications suggest a shortage of on street parking in future, then these should be pinned onto the map too.

Q. David Scott: He commented that experimental introductions including 'pilots' is a good way to help people envisage how things will be in the future.

Q: Catherine Menell,: The new development of flats on the junction of Camden Road and the Grosvenor Bridge has provided parking for residents but this appears to be contrary to this plan for 'better streets'.

6. Update from member organisations: None

7. Town Forum Communications and Public Engagement

Don Sloan outlined that the Town Forum management group had been discussing how it could be more effective in communicating with members and identifying their key issues. He asked what constitutes effective communications for the Town Forum? He welcomed the meetings and presentations, production of detailed reports, responding to consultations, participate in working groups and acting as a critical friend, but wondered how well it is interacting well with its members and the locality.

In response to a question from the floor, "What is the purpose of Town Forum" and why does it have less 'clout' than a parish, Mark Booker explained that the Town Forum fills a democratic deficit in Tunbridge Wells. About half the borough population has no low tier representation unlike the country parishes have parish councillors in addition to borough councillors. The option of a town council was considered but rejected and the Town Forum was set up as a semi-democratic voluntary body to provide part of what a town or parish council can do - but it has no money or no power. This is unsatisfactory although the relationship with TWBC has been positive recently and the Forum has produced serious of reports and documents to feed into the consultation process. It is consulted as

if it was a statutory body but it has no official power. Problems arising are that we do not get proper feedback on data and recommendations we put forward, neither can we achieve fully representative and firm decision from members.

Stuart Anderson argued that we are at a turning point where we have to ensure we are representing the local people.

Cllr O' Connell warned against ruling out ever having a town council as it would give more powers locally. There is a campaign in Tonbridge for a Town Council. She complained that she didn't have a feel for what are the current communication channels and how can they be improved.

Don Sloan said the Forum's meetings, website and social media had served well but he recognised that the Forum needs to consider this mix more carefully together with the deficit in communicating with a wider range of groups in RTW

Susan Bishop said that it has a What's App group for reporting back and highlighting issues of interest. However, it tends to be a one way channel and seldom gets two way traffic. Stuart Anderson suggested that framing the communication as a question or poll (what do you think about?) rather than just sending information out works well in Beulah Road and creates a conversation.

Jane Fenwick argued that issues are not a simple yes/no and there is necessary background to all decisions that needs to be conveyed.

Stuart Anderson said the Town Forum is not a diverse group of people as we do not represent to the whole of the town, and we are all of a similar age, class and ethnic group. How do we diversify as a group into younger people, a wider range of wards and to identify through those who have some 'citizen power' in that local community.

Caroline Auckland commented that this discussion was refreshing. Normally the meetings run out of time to have a follow up discussion. Fewer speakers, more two-way communication and time to allow people to express their concerns at the meetings is needed.

Paul Mason said there is a great value in a bunch of people who have the interests of RTW at heart coming together to talk about it – a 'talking shop' can be good as people bounce ideas off each other. The fact that it has no teeth is not a reason to do without it. We can talk direct to our councillors. RTW Town Forum's structure is not unique and we can learn from other similar bodies.

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of policy development. Councillors need to represent their wards and see who in the Town Forum is from their ward.

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8. Update from the Borough Council: Cllr Justine Rutland (Full report attached)

- **Toilets:** The TW Soroptimists have bestowed the status of Toilet Twinned Town on RTW on behalf of the Toilet Twinning charity that funds very poor communities overseas to build their own basic toilet, access clean water and learn about hygiene. The TW Soroptimists and others who have supported the project by collecting cans.
TWBC, BID and Targetfollow, are looking at options for the provision of toilets in the Pantiles. The toilets in Grosvenor & Hilbert Park are currently closed awaiting installation of new doors. Those at Wellington Rocks will have a facelift soon by a graffiti artist called Humour.
- **TW in Bloom** judging of is underway for both S&SE in Bloom on Friday and the National categories national judges later in July.
- **Amelia Scott:** first year review (see attached full report) showed visitor numbers to 31 March 2023 reached over 300,000; the call centre dealt with more than 179,000 calls relating to council services; visitors are mainly people living within the borough but nearly a quarter are from outside the borough; a quarter of people visit weekly, 30 per cent use three or more services when they visit; over 4,000 school children have visited as part of planned school activities. Most visitors go on to do something else in the town benefitting local shops, businesses and the wider economy. Among issues highlighted are signage, heavy doors and heat in the building.
- **Former Arriva bus depot site/Elysian retirement apartments in St John's Rd.** Now marketed as The Beckett' and opening spring 2024. A water feature will be installed at the entrance.
- **Former cinema site:** Work starts on site early 2024. TF members can sign up for a newsletter via the website: <https://tunbridge-wells.retirementvillages.co.uk/> or on Facebook 'Thrive Living in Tunbridge Wells'.
- **Co-working at the Town Hall:** Town Square has submitted a listed building consent application to be considered at the 19 July Planning Committee. It should all start in late summer. A full time Community Hub Manager is being recruited.
<https://thetownsquare.co.uk/news/were-recruiting-hub-manager-in-tunbridge-wells>.
- **Public Realm 2 :** Vehicle numbers entering the restriction have fallen from around 1000 a day to around 200 a day. There have been meetings with Culverden residents and later with KCC officers to discuss next steps.
- **High Street:** The Traffic Regulation Order has been approved by the Joint Transportation Board. TWBC is working with BID on improving the street furniture and already some of the businesses have expressed an interest in adopting the planters. Lorna Blackmore was thanked for her important input at the JTB on behalf of the Town Forum.

- **Councillor Convention:** A report on this Convention in June is being prepared together with analysis of recent residents' and staff surveys.
- **Transport in and around RTW:** Consultants have been appointed for the design of the Rusthall to town centre cycle route . The TWBC, KCC and local stakeholders including the Town Forum and Commons Conservators will be invited to engage.

High Brooms station access – Prior Approval was granted on 22nd June for the 'Proposed construction of a new link bridge including a lift and staircase at either end'. The installation work of the ramp/internal lift serving the southbound platform does not require planning permission.

Station ticket office closure. TWBC has been advised by Southeastern that Phase 2 Consultation on ticket office closure will cover Kent and East Sussex and will go live this autumn. The current proposal below is that busier stations retain 'Travel Centres' and remaining station ticket offices will close. Tonbridge would be the nearest Travel Centre. Staff from the ticket offices will get support and training to transition to new roles where they will be able to provide a wider range of customer support including helping people purchase tickets from machines and helping people with accessibility requirements and keeping people safe. No stations will be left unstaffed by these changes. Southeastern is proposing that some stations which are currently unstaffed – such as High Brooms – should be restaffed.

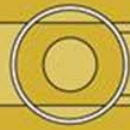
KCC Local Transport Plan : Consultation is open until 18 September and the document can be found at [Emerging Local Transport Plan | Let's talk Kent.](#)

- **Parking:** TWBC Parking Team is looking into parking issues in Grosvenor Road related to fast food outlets. Work on a TWBC Parking Strategy has begun and some further work on transport will be undertaken during preparation of Town Centre Plan.
- **BID** is to employ someone (subject to KCC approval) to do small maintenance jobs around the town centre such as painting and graffiti removal.
- **Pantiles consultation: Planning:** Following complaints from various parties, TWBC has reminded Targetfollow of its planning obligations, and dialogue is ongoing.

9 Reports from the Town Forum Working Groups

- Transport Working Group report will be sent out with the Minutes of this meeting.
- The Finance Working Party has been reformed and includes David Scott (Chairperson), Adrian Berendt and Stuart Anderson. Its aim is to provide Town Forum members with greater clarification regarding major financial matters regarding the Council. The aim is to create papers that are factual, concise, and readable. It will not comment regarding expenditure that may have gone up or down in comparison to budgets or over the last two years other than to summarise points made in the official papers. The FWG is currently working to provide an 'understandable' 4 page document to be circulated to everyone to allow discussions.

13 Future Meetings: **September 14th** and the **AGM on November 16th** will hopefully be in the Council Chamber but members will be advised.



Agenda 12

RTW Town Forum Going Forward: Modernising

To review before the meeting if possible

Our current purpose and range of activities: see Town Forum in Action document updated for our meeting in March 23. Also Chairman's Annual Report for 22-23 in the current AGM agenda papers.

Possible points for consideration at the meeting

1. Actual and potential changes in political structures: next year 39 Councillors and ward changes in LGBCE reforms. Potential move later to a Town Council in a unitary authority and implications?
2. Degree of representation of diversity and area coverage within Tunbridge Wells by TF.
3. Better and broader use of technology: appropriate use of Zoom for meetings, use of WhatsApp, google groups etc.
4. Currently at meetings we have more presentations and information provision than discussions - views on this?
5. Outreach and Communications by TF: Public meetings? Social Gatherings? Press relations?
6. See also Communications and Public Engagement report from minutes of 13 July below.
7. Suggestion of questionnaire to members seeking their views. Could ask why some not attending meetings, how we can improve, how can you help, what skills can you bring to TF, mix and types of meetings preferred, social gatherings? Other questions?

Town Forum SWOT analysis, See below

2. Important Background material

Town Forum in Action:

Background/context for Forum meeting, 30 March 2023

1. Who we are

The Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum is a partnership between Residents' Representatives and ward Councillors in the Town of Royal Tunbridge Wells, the unparished area of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

It was formed in July 2005 with the purpose of addressing local issues.

See:

www.townforum.org.uk

<http://townforum.org.uk/administration/townforumobjectivetermsreferencejune2016.pdf>

<http://www.townforum.org.uk/terms.html>

- Gives the original 2011 constitution and then amended in 2016, plus amended aims and objectives, terms of reference.

2. What we do (types of activities)

- Communicate with councillors and critical friend to TWBC

- Encourage members to address their concerns to ward councillors and officers, and advise how to raise issues and speak at TWBC committees (e.g. Joint Transportation Board [JTB])
- Speak in support of member organisations at TWBC committees where appropriate (e.g. where issues have a wider concern)
- Respond to consultations, TWBC and others on behalf of the RTW TF and encourage RTW TF members to contribute and/or respond themselves
- Provide a platform for communications to and from our members and with other organisations. Presentations at meetings.
- Engage with the community, giving updates via meetings, minutes, and participate in TWBC Working Groups when invited.
- Identify needs and promote improvements in Royal Tunbridge Wells ideally before final plans are prepared and published for consultation [e.g.in](#) planning, transport, leisure, finance, environment, safety etc.
- Persuade TWBC and developers to refresh existing, and install new, water features in keeping with the character of Royal Tunbridge Wells
-

Website: townforum.org.uk
 Facebook: TownForumRTW
 Twitter: @townforum

3. Recent significant actions

3.1 Cross-Party Working Group

Chaired the Council's Cross-Party Working Group leading to:

- agreement on Town Hall co-working
- new outline strategy replacing Calverley Square

Participation in other working groups

- Town Centre Local Area Plan
- Ukrainian refugees
- Shared Prosperity Fund

For last year's actions see Chairman's report attached to November 24, 2022 AGM agenda.

3.2 Responded to consultations

- Tunbridge Wells Local Plan:

Responded to the Planning Inspector's questions under Stage 1 of the Public Examination; it is based on RTW TF 'Call for Sites' response and RTW TF 'Reg 19 Consultation' response and deals only with issues concerning the town Royal Tunbridge Wells (Planning Working Group February 2022). Participation in next stage.

- Towards Change – analysis of transport issues
(Transport Working Group, June 2017)

- Town Centre Transport Plan (taking account of Covid and Climate change priorities): *The 'New Normal' for Transport in RTW*
(Transport Working Group, Updated May 2020)

- National government consultation on Pavement Parking (Transport Working Group, November 2020)
- Vision for Royal Tunbridge Wells 2017-2033 (Planning Working Group, February 2017)
- Stage 2 Cultural Hub (Amelia Scott Project)
- KCC consultation on Cultural Strategy (Culture, Leisure, Tourism Working Group, March 2017)
- Article 4 Direction for St James Ward (intended to be much wider coverage)
- TWBC Budgets (Finance Working Group, January every year)

3.3 Helped in conducting surveys

- Undertook with TF volunteers identification of all the alleyways, twittens and paths to ensure all are registered as PROW or have legal protection. Report produced, paths added to TWBC GIS. Awaiting discussion on further action by TWBC re legal protection. Referred two 'Lost Ways' to Ramblers Association for inclusion in their campaign.
- LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans) pedestrian routes: assisted officers in walking survey of condition of proposed LCWIP routes in preparation for funding applications.
- Survey the benches in the town RTW
- Local List of Buildings of Architectural and Historic Importance
- High Street survey of businesses and public (resulting now in more attractive and one-way traffic street)

3.4 Provided Platform for presentations at meetings

This year:

- Local Government Boundary Commission England: LGBCE Electoral Boundary Review
- Updates on the Tunbridge Wells and Rusthall Commons
- new plans for cinema site
- proposals for Chalybeate spring

3.5 Helped prepare way for easing traffic congestion / cycling

Through engagement with officers and councillors:

- pressure to reduce 'free' on street parking
- object to park and ride and bypass suggestions
- 20mph in residential areas (ambition is the whole town RTW)
- deter use of bus stand on London Road as a bus depot for school services
- 'Go' buses no longer drop children on Culverden Down
- High Street as one way street since 2021 (2nd year of Covid-19 lockdown)
- Continue to work with and defer to the expertise of TW BUG, Bicycle Users Group
- Took part in "Cycle Path for visitors" (2015-16).

3.6 Community safety

Pressed to keep CCTV in town

Asking for accessible public toilets for everyone

3.7 Water features

Campaigned for more water features, now added in Royal Tunbridge Wells e.g. at:

- Knightswood
- Royal Wells (old Kent and Sussex hospital site)
- 1887 The Pantiles

3.8 Culture, Leisure, Tourism

-Published Tunbridge Wells tourism and the cultural offer "*A place of pleasure and resort*" (Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group, January 2013)

>>> <http://www.townforum.org.uk/community/rtwtourismculture-report2013.pdf>

-Took part in and advised on projects such as Wayfaring Signage, Information Points, Map of RTW, tourism leaflet, Plaques for Historical Walks.

-Amelia Scott Culture, Arts, and Heritage Project:

Supported the strong views in the town against minimising her name to a 'brand' Amelia instead of full name 'Amelia Scott'

3.9 Environment

Published the "RTW Green Network" 2016

>>> <http://www.townforum.org.uk/community/rtwgreennetwork-report2016withphotos.pdf>

adopted by TWBC

Town Forum Communications and Public Engagement (extract from minutes of 13 July 2023)

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Paul Mason said he we could use social media more but not in its present form. Next Door discussions nearly always end up with personal insults. We could set up something like Next Door which but not allow people to be anonymous and have to register with name and address, and include elected councillors. David Scott added that Talking Point had this facility but as Mark Booker commented the Town Forum has no funds to purchase any system and is suffering from less support from 'TWBC'.

Cllr Rutland noted that the Council had fallen into the habit of not sharing information and assuming more items than necessary are 'confidential'. However, we can just ask by email the relevant councillor to lift this obstruction."

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <p>Skillset of members and residents generally</p> <p>Commitment from individuals</p> <p>Penetration in particular places</p> <p>Comms up and down</p> <p>Face to Face meetings as well as ZOOM meetings</p> <p>Quality reports used by the Council</p> <p>Various associated groups in addition to Residents Groups</p> <p>Historic secretarial and admin support from the Council. (Can the support be reinstated?)</p> <p>Ability to frame questions, reviews and proposals in a non-political balanced format.</p>	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <p>Demographics of membership</p> <p>Lack of financial and administrative support from BC</p> <p>Lack of public profile</p> <p>Poor communication to many of the members of our Member organisations</p> <p>No communication with many residents</p> <p>Few meetings and few Members active with the TF between meetings</p> <p>Council reports are long, complex and difficult to understand, especially for residents</p> <p>No recognised budget or direct funding for TF</p> <p>No real influence over Council's resources or physical assets.</p> <p>No <i>effective functioning</i> direct point of contact with TWBC on significant issues</p> <p>Difficulty in maintaining up to date and easy to read / understand info for residents</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <p>Act as shadow Town Council</p> <p>Communication channel to and from BC</p> <p>Critical friend</p> <p>Local newspapers</p> <p>Access to social media</p> <p>Council's improved 'Town Square' system</p> <p>Access to Charity and CIC for RTW</p>	<p>THREATS</p> <p>Unitaries threaten income/assets of RTW</p> <p>Dwindling interest in TF</p> <p>Worsening demographics of membership</p> <p>Reduced Council officer and Councillor support</p> <p>Decisions taken by TWBC and KCC without real consultation of the TF</p> <p>No real recognition of Special Expenses for RTW</p>

AGENDA 9

Reports from member organisations



Tunbridge Wells Twinning & Friendship Association

NOTE FOR TOWN FORUM 16 NOVEMBER 2023: Reports from member organisations

One of the primary aims of the Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association (TWTFA) is to identify and act as a link between individuals and groups in Wiesbaden and Tunbridge Wells that have shared interests and aspirations. One of our recent successes has been the establishment of a link between **The Oaks Specialist College** in Tonbridge and the **Facettenwerk** organisation in Wiesbaden. Both organisations prepare young adults with learning difficulties for the world of work.

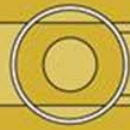
In June four learners from the Oaks, together with two staff members and Mike McGeary, Deputy Chairman of TWTFA, spent five days in Wiesbaden as guests of the Facettenwerk and the Domäne Mechtildshausen which have similar aims and objectives. The visit had two main aims. Firstly, for The Oaks learners to enjoy a holiday in our wonderful twin city gaining in life-experience and self-confidence. Secondly, for the Oaks staff to share best practice with their Wiesbaden counterparts. Both aims were achieved beyond our expectations. The Oaks staff went well-prepared and discovered they had much in common with the Wiesbaden professionals. The young adults, some of whom had not been abroad before, engaged themselves fully in the activities at the two centres and greatly appreciated the sight-seeing element of the trip. They grew visibly in self-confidence and in gelling as a group across the five days away from home. The group was given a civic reception, hosted by the Lord Mayor of Wiesbaden in the Town Hall, a novel experience which they will surely never forget!

As for outcomes, staff discussions with their counterparts were extremely fruitful. The Oaks' group leader, Jackie, declared that *"We plan to strengthen our relationships, through more visits and opportunities for work-based learning and the sharing of best practice"*. Gordon Tillman, The Oaks' Chief Executive Officer, offered his sincere thanks to the TWTFA for its *"integral part of what, as predicted, was a stunning success"*.

This initiative is but one example of the valuable intermediary work of the TWTFA. The initial visit to Wiesbaden has already led to a suggested visit to Tunbridge Wells by a group from the Facettenwerk next year and a return trip by learners from The Oaks to Wiesbaden in 2025. In the meantime, the staff, working together with TWTFA, will maintain contact with the Facettenwerk organisation on a regular basis throughout the coming academic year.

A further TWTFa initiative, and one that could be of particular interest to Town Forum members, is the participation of the Carr Taylor vineyard in the **2024 Wiesbaden Wine Festival**. The Festival runs from 9-18 August, and if all goes according to plan, we hope to promote a group visit during this period. As the representative for the Twinning Association on the Forum, I will keep you posted.

(Michael Holman, President, Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association)



Agenda 13

Working Group Reports

Strategic Planning

This report received 6 November

Response to the Inspector: Proposed amendments to the Draft Local Plan

Summary

The planning and transportation Cabinet Advisory Board will consider proposals and options for major modifications when it meets on 13th November. Broadly, the recommendation is to delete Tudeley from the allocations and to modify slightly the plans for development at Paddock Wood. Nothing of importance is modified in relation to Royal Tunbridge Wells so that the two major Green Belt sites at Caenwood and Spratsbrook farms are maintained and are likely to be accelerated. No adjustments are proposed in the town centre with in total just 5 short paragraphs dealing with RTW, proposing to delete the deletion of Colebrook House from Green Belt and confirming the possibility of widening High Woods Lane to access the proposed Hawkenbury Hub developments. No further development in the RTW Green Belt has been put forward beyond the previous draft allocations. Relevant paragraphs from the response are reproduced below. The proposed timetable is: Planning & Transportation CAB 13.11.23 Cabinet 07.12.23 Full Council 13.12.23, to be followed by public consultation if Officer recommendations approved.

Extracts

4.7 The overall findings of the review are that the conclusions in the original Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and SHELAA that resulted in the sites identified as reasonable alternatives not being regarded as suitable for allocation remain valid. An important factor in reaching these conclusions is that there are often other reasons or combinations of reasons, sometimes including Green Belt harm, that led officers to conclude the site was not suitable as a potential allocation in the Local Plan.

4.22 Overall, it is considered that the matters raised by the Inspector regarding Location and Accessibility (at Tudeley) are capable of being satisfied. However, with these matters there was considerable challenge from Tonbridge and Malling BC previously, so it is likely that concerns from them will be maintained.

4.27 In regard to the Five Oak Green Bypass and its deliverability, evidence provided in support of the SLP identified that it would be dependent on the adoption of the Local Plan and then Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) process.

4.28 If Local Plan adoption were in late 2024, then construction should still be achievable by the time the bypass is needed, allowing for slippage in both the Local Plan timetable and in housing completions, and with some scope for potential delays in the acquisition and construction processes; however, the approval processes and land acquisition are still considered to be a risk that needs consideration.

4.32 The Tudeley site benefits from being in one ownership rather than the subject of multiple developers meaning that, with suitable professional advice and resourcing, the development could come forward with a level of certainty in terms of timing. Furthermore, the Council has set up a Strategic Sites team of Planners specifically to progress such schemes.

Transport Strategy

Annual report of the Transport Working Group of the RTW Town Forum

from November 2022- November 2023

TWG members: Jane Fenwick (Chair), David Scott, Katharina Mahler Bech, Chris Ferguson-Gow, Cllr Peter Lidstone, Carol Wilson, Lorna Blackmore and Adrian Berendt. Meetings were held on 7th November 2022, 10th January, 21st June and 17th October 2023.

The Covid pandemic had a huge impact on transport systems and on the behaviour of commuters, cyclists and pedestrians. The TWG was largely focussed on supporting ideas to capture the benefits of the experience for promoting a more 'active travel' environment that would reduce pollution and benefit health and wellbeing of people living and working in the town. These included:

- A 'whole town' 20mph scheme was proposed to local councillors to consider. Adrian Berendt discussed 20mph issues with representatives of Warwick Park and Speldhurst Parish Council.
- Parking statistics that showed a reduced use of the town's car parks reflecting changed work and retail patterns were analysed. The growth of electric cars which are heavier and wider would also likely affect the town's car park estate. We await expected new strategies from TWBC on Parking Strategy and e-Charging. We recognise that it is important to have a viable and affordable range of transport options for all types of journey.
- Support was given to making the High Street one way scheme permanent and we called for improved planters, wider pavements and other design improvements. Lorna Blackmore conducted a survey retailers views and presented the result to the Joint Transportation Board meeting on this topic.
- Support was given to the bid for funding to design of new cycle routes from Rustall using some Commons land, and pedestrian and cycle improvement in the St John's/St James residential area. TWG members and local residents Chris Ferguson Gow and Cllr Peter Lidstone, have taken a close interest in the consultation process.
- Once the schools reopened the large number of double decker buses returned and parked on London Road and around the town all day after transporting children from around Kent and Sussex to local schools. The main bus stand was always full so that tourist coaches could not stop, and views of the Commons were blighted. We supported local residents who urged the TWBC to find alternative locations for all this bus and coach traffic but no solution has been proposed.
- The Mount Pleasant 'bus gate' scheme had been operational for some time before it was finally enforced this year resulting in many complaints, confusion and anger at fines imposed. The TWG had alerted TWBC to the inadequate and confused signage when it was first opened but drivers had got used to driving through without enforcement. As a result there has been difficulty in changing driving habits to enforce the scheme. Local residents most affected are very unhappy and continue to press for solutions. TWG members helped with traffic counts in the area.

The TWG will continue to monitor these issues, and others as they arise.



Town Forum: Finance Working Group

Report

I would like to thank the members of the Working Group Adrian Berendt and Stuart Anderson for their work in reviewing the Council's finances and the information provided by the Council. We would like to encourage other RTW residents with appropriate financial skills, to join the Working Group to ensure we can carry out our aims as diligently as possible.

Objectives:

To track and present with clarity, the Council's financial position and access to funding with the aim of:

- Ensuring we understand the ability of the Council to continue to finance services and future investments and report on these with clarity.
- Review and report on value for money
- Help residents / Members to evaluate services and investments they feel are appropriate for Royal Tunbridge Wells
- Enable residents / Members to take into account the financial position of the council and assess priorities.

Our Report for 16th November 2023

1. Review of overall budgets and actuals

(see detailed report in the Appendix dated 28th July 2023)

The team issued a concise report aimed at demystifying the Council's finances. The primary aim was to understand and explain the Council's finances within potentially conflicting views. They noted that "some argue that the Council's financial position is dire", while others say that "it's fine and dandy". However the group concluded that both can be true, depending on the assumptions made.

The key is the fundamental difference between **(i) the actual results at the year-end compared to the actual results in the previous year and (ii) a comparison of the values budgeted and the actual outcome for the same year**. The latter is based on the income and expenditure of what may happen - based on assumptions about the future.

Untangling the facts about the Borough Council's financial position has proved complex because of 1) COVID and 2) multiple changes in government funding in recent years and 3) large changes in income and expenditure not assumed in the budgets at the beginning of the year. In addition there have been some large accounting swings on funding for pensions. These have led to very significant variances year on year and between budgets and actuals. However, throughout this turbulent time, during COVID and subsequently, the Council has still managed to achieve surpluses each year and contributed significantly to reserves and strengthened provisions.

Taking these into account, the Working Group concluded that:

While the current financial situation is robust - total assets of £158m and free reserves of £28m and no borrowing - the future situation is uncertain. The Borough Council has assumed an annual increase over the next 5 years in core income of 3% pa with expenditure growing by 10% pa.

It is almost inevitable that what actually happens over the next 5 years will be very different to the assumptions made at the beginning of this year. The differences for last year are explained in the attached detailed report.

*The resulting 7% gap in assumptions would lead to a rapid rundown in reserves, unless **a)** income is above and / or **b)** expenditure is below, that assumed in the budget. This is the challenge facing the Borough Council over the next five years.*

The difference between the two views can thus be reconciled as the difference between taking a very prudent view looking forward which largely sets out a 'worst case' scenario based on pessimistic assumptions compared to what actually happened/s (see detailed report attached).

The Town Forum Working Group will continue to monitor the situation over the current financial year and subsequent years of the Long-term budget to determine if the assumptions are prudent or over-prudent and whether the budgeted financial gap can and is being managed to ensure a positive outcome.

We note that one other neighbouring council does provide budgets where several different scenarios are presented. We would welcome this approach, if adopted by the Council.

2. Understanding Special Expenses

The working group has spent time examining both Special Expenses - the 'precept' paid by residents within RTW (areas covered by the Town Forum) and TWBC's overall finances. The Town Forum will continue to investigate the process for deciding which town amenities it funds - mainly the town's parks. While we have the detailed spreadsheets, we are asking for greater clarity from The Finance Department. We feel this will become particularly important should Kent adopt a system of Unified Councils rather than the current system of two tiers (County and Borough).

3. Recent news – Royal Victoria Place (RVP)

The very recent news about TWBC buying British Land out of their lease on Royal Victoria Place has yet to be fully digested but will surely have a significant impact on council finances in future years. Financial information has not yet been released by the Council. The historical information that is available can only provide a background to this major development.

4. Annual Audit

We would like to congratulate the Council on (i) a successful positive audit, for the 14th year in succession; and (ii) the early completion of the audit well before most other Councils in the country.

We look forward to meeting with Lee Colyer and colleagues in the Finance Department to discuss the above in more detail. We fully appreciate that this has been a busy time for them with the completion of the annual audit and the acquisition of the RVP Lease. We look forward to cooperating with them to enable us to present our analysis to residents / Members during the forthcoming year.

Finally, more volunteers with some financial knowledge or training are welcome, indeed needed, on the Finance Working Group in what is likely to prove an equally challenging year for local councils throughout the UK in 2023/24.

David A. Scott, Chairman, Finance Working Party
4th November 2023

Water in the Wells

REPORT TO THE TOWN FORUM for 16 November 2023

Current membership: Bob Atwood, Jane Fenwick, Michael Holman (Chair), Mike McGeary, Altan Omer, David Scott, Pat Wilson.

We held our most recent in person meeting on 31 October. Only a small meeting, for Jane was in Australia, Pat Wilson had a prior commitment, and Alastair Tod, who had for many years been a mainstay of the Working Group, has sadly decided to stand down. We are hugely grateful to Alastair for his informed support and hope the Civic Society will be able to find a replacement for him. We would also welcome additional active members.

There have been few changes to the town's water features – existing and anticipated – since my report to the Forum on 13 July 2023. I need, however, to bring the following to your attention.

1. **Water in the Wells CIC and Refresh Tunbridge Wells CIO:** it became clear as the project to restore the Horatio Love Fountain progressed, that the aims of Water in the Wells, (a Community Interest Company CIC) and Refresh Tunbridge Wells, (a Charitable Incorporated Organisation CIO) often overlapped. Now, with the successful start of the Refresh Box Art Project (BAP) to employ local artists to decorate Open Reach utility cabinets in the centre of town, the Working Group has decided to add reports on Refresh projects to the regular Water in the Wells reports.
2. **Refresh Box Art Project (BAP)**
Local artist Louise Dean has almost completed decoration of two formerly green Open Reach cabinets at the Monson Road end of the Calverley Road Precinct. Following a Refresh brief to create colourful artwork that is playful and whimsical, bringing nature into the town, she has totally transformed the unsightly cabinets. They are now unique pieces of public art (picture overleaf). Her scenes of small animals, domestic and wild, linked by blossoming branches, will appeal particularly to small children. Refresh is now drawing up plans to raise funds that will enable further cabinets to be similarly transformed.
3. **Bottle-filling stations:** the bright blue bottle-filling station (bfs) in **The Grove** is looking good and operating well. In **Dunorlan** the bfs flow needs to be centralized so that the water flows into the basin, not down the side. The bfs in **Grosvenor and Hilbert Park** has unfortunately been installed outside the public toilets instead of at the chosen site near to the Auckland Road entrance close to the bowling green. Friends of the Park are attempting to have it relocated. In **Calverley Grounds** we are still waiting for the planned bfs to be installed. The site originally identified was between the children's adventure playground and the open-air gym at the back of the tennis courts. A more appropriate site, the WG considered, would be outside the café, replacing the unsightly water tap.
4. **Amelia Scott drinking-water fountain:** as mentioned in my last report, the drinking spouts have been incorrectly positioned. We have been advised by Jeremy Kimmel that they cannot be repositioned. They can, however, be used to refill bottles, so the drinking water fountain will now be a bfs.



I am happy to answer any questions and provide additional information.
(6 November 2023)

(Michael Holman, Chairman, 'Water in the Wells' and 'Refresh Tunbridge Wells') 07799456524; email: michaeldekholman@gmail.com

Appendix: Finance Working Party**Quick-fire questions about the Council's finance**

Evaluating the Council's financial position is about looking at the past, the current position and the future. The annual Financial Statement published each autumn provides the definitive results, while the budget provides a projection for the future. These two sources of financial information are based on specific assumptions and processes applicable to local government bodies. Generally they are based on the Council as a continuing organisation but on low-risk assumptions in terms of valuations of assets and debtsⁱ, future income and expensesⁱⁱ

There are various other sources of information such as the Codebookⁱⁱⁱ (detailed transactions summarised by accounting codes). Other items are less easily tracked such as Section 106 monies (paid by developers towards infrastructure and other projects), Special Funds (allocated to RTW), road and parking fines (used for road related projects).

Local Authorities present Financial Statements in a way that is a bit incomprehensible, even to those with financial expertise from the commercial world. We try here to present the figures in a way which is consistent and more understandable. In particular, we have noted those items which are a) highly volatile, such as pension fund surpluses and deficits and b) where TWBC is simply the collection agent of taxes for a third party (such as KCC).

Some argue that the Council's financial position is dire. Others say that "it's fine and dandy". Both can be true, depending on the assumptions made. This analysis attempts to explain the assumptions underlying both the "black hole" position and the alternative position of "financial strength" can also be argued.

Current Position		
	Is the Council solvent?	Yes. The net worth (all assets less what it owes) of the Council as at 31 st March 2023 (latest draft financial statements) is £158 million (£99m previous year). This increase of £58m was primarily due to a pension adjustment (see next section*) of £56m. The net increase from other causes was £1,657,000
* Note	Pension Liability	As a result of a 3-year review as at 31/3/2022 and the market value of assets as at 31/3/2023, the liability was reduced by £56m thus releasing funds built up by the Council over years to meet this liability. However pension liabilities can vary substantially each year. As a 'paper' transaction held primarily as council property, this resulted in an effective change of ownership from the 'pension fund' to 'taxpayers'. This potentially improves the Council's ability to borrow but has no other short- or medium-term impact.
	How strong is the council's position	It has total assets of £201million, held mainly as property assets (£138m), short-term investments (£39m) and cash (£11m)
	Does the Council have any debt?	It has no borrowings. It has pensions due (long-term) of £5m and creditors (mainly KCC and other tax receivers) of £24m. It has usable reserves of £29m (without realising any capital gains from properties owned).
	I pay £1,000 Council tax. Where does this money go?	Less than £100 is retained by TW Council. The rest is paid to Kent CC, Police & fire services and government. These are paid in arrears as noted above.

The Financial Year 2022/23		
	What happened during 2022/23? <i>(Budget 2022/2023 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Update for Cabinet 10 February 2022, section 1.2)</i>	<p>The budget for 2022/23 (Feb 2022) was recommended to full Council on the basis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing financial impact of the pandemic • The erratic nature of government funding • New capital investment schemes (capital budget) <p>No major cuts to services and focus on supporting residents and businesses during the pandemic.</p>

	(pgs 18-20, Draft Annual Financial report 2022/23)	<p>This is restated in the draft Annual Financial report: “Whilst Government had provided financial support packages during the pandemic, the council had been notified that these would all cease by April 2022 and so the Council entered this financial year expecting to need £944,000 from its reserves to balance its revenue budget. The aim was to protect services whilst giving time for customer behaviours to settle and for the Council to establish a contingency plan which, if necessary, could raise income and/or reduce costs to rebalance its budget.”</p> <p>“In Feb. 2022, after the budget had been set, Russia invaded Ukraine, resulting in considerable impact upon the Council’s budget. The main considerations brought about by the pandemic and the war, for the 2022/23 accounts have been the impact upon the sales, fees and charges, revenue costs, Government grants, property valuations, pension valuations, investment valuations and impairments for doubtful debts.”</p>
The Budget and end of year result		
	Budget compared to actual	“The recovery from Covid was better than expected”, however “the war in Ukraine and the considerable levels of inflation over the past year, have put significant pressure on <i>(other)</i> already stretched budgets”.
	What was the surplus or deficit for 2022/23 and what was budgeted for the same year?	<p>The total actual surplus for 2022/23 was £3.8m, inclusive of amounts paid into revenue provision, reserves and earmarked general fund. Of this £18,000 (budget surplus) was transferred to the General Fund, £1,079,000 transferred to the ‘Minimum Revenue Provision’ and £2,699,000 was transferred to ‘earmarked reserves’.</p> <p>The total budgeted surplus for 2022/23 was £99,000 which allowed for a potential drawdown of ‘earmarked reserves’ of £940,000 (budget deficit), £324,000 to be paid to the ‘minimum earmarked provision’ and £719,000 to ‘earmarked reserves’.</p>
	Where did the Council get its income last year (2022/23)?	<p>Some figures are shown as net of expenses. So the Finance Dept has a surplus mainly due to parking charges of £0.92m. Many fees are absorbed to pay towards operating costs such as Planning. Increasing interest rates^{iv} have allowed increasing investment returns on cash and investments held.</p> <p>Retained Council taxes (including parishes) is £12.2m, Business rates £3.8m, Government grants £2.6m, £1.8m Interest and investment income. Although distributed by the council, Housing Benefits are paid in full by the government.</p>
	What were the expenses of the council (2022/23)?	The cost of services (net of direct charges made for services e.g. parking and planning), was £13.4m. In addition £3.0m was paid to parishes
	What were the major differences compared to the budget?	<p>Improvements i.e. better than expected (additional income / reduced costs): Parking etc £0.34m, Business rates £1.16m, Investment income £1.21m, Gov grants £0.22m, Development & property £0.33m, planning £0.15m, housing & health £0.52m, other £0.13m = Total £4.07m</p> <p>Reductions i.e. worse than expected (higher cost or lower income): Facilities & hubs £0.11m, vacancy factor £0.26m =Total £0.37m</p> <p>An increase in the Surplus by £3.70m compared to the budget.</p> <p>Of which £2.7m was used for reserves, provisions, general fund; £0.94m eliminated the budget provision, leaving a net surplus of £18,000 which was transferred to the general fund.</p>

Financial Statements, Comparison between 2021/22 and 2022/23				
	From financial and economic viewpoints, these two years were very different. 2021/22 was the second year of COVID with major changes in activities and grants received while 2022/23 was post covid recovery but faced with substantial inflation (particularly energy cost). In both years there were major changes to the financial results of the Council.			
Change 2021/22 to 2022/23	Expenditure		Income	
	Employee & other expenses	£ 2.43m decrease	Fees, charges income	£2.72 increase
	Property changes in value	£10.64m increase	Interest & investments	£0.65m decrease
	Interest payments	£ 2.02m increase	Council & business tax	£0.46m increase
	Precepts and levies	£ 2.01m increase	Grants & contributions	£7.98 reduction
<p><i>NB This is a comparison of actual results at the year end to the actual results in the previous year.</i></p> <p><i>It is fundamentally different to a comparison of the values budgeted for 2022/23 and the actual outcome for the same year as discussed above.</i></p> <p><i>Budgets are based on anticipated expenditure, on a prudent view of what is anticipated to happen.</i></p>		<p>As a result there was a surplus of £6.93 million in 2021/22 and a deficit of £9.98 million in 2022/23 on the provision of services.</p> <p>Adjustment in the revaluation or recognition of impairment of non-current assets and the remeasurement of pension defined benefits resulted in major surpluses in the 'Total Comprehensive Income' in both years. While these changes are of major financial importance, they are difficult to understand for most non-finance professionals and difficult to budget. Property and pensions are always difficult to value either on an 'ongoing' or 'sale' value.</p> <p>As a result in 2022/23 Net Assets of the Council increased by £58.1million of which £56.5m (was a reduction in Pension Liability, showing an overall increase of £1.7million)</p> <p>In the previous year (2021/22) Net Assets of the Council increased by £14.2m of which £7.8m was a reduction in Pension Liability, showing an overall increase of £6.4million</p>		

The Future		
	The budget ^{vi}	<p>The budget for 2023/24 (Feb 2023) was recommended to full Council on the basis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of high levels of inflation • New capital investment schemes (capital budget) of £0.6m • No major changes or cuts to services
Comparisons	Overall figure	Main underlying justification / reasons
2023/24 budget	Deficit of £943,000 Plus No change in reserves assumed	High levels of inflation continuing
2022/23 actual	Surplus of £18,000 Plus Increase reserves by £3,778,000	Recovery from COVID, high inflation, increased provisions & reserves
2022/23 budget	Deficit of £944,000 Plus Increase reserves by £1,043,000	Continuation of COVID, erratic government funding
2021/22 actual	Surplus of £35,000 Plus Increase reserves by £3,043,000	Impact of COVID on income, expenditure & funding
	The key risks	<p>Risk factors identified are primarily national risks of the high inflation (particularly energy), climate emergency, pandemics, general underfunding, changes in government policy and funding.</p> <p>Specific to the Council are: employee shortages and pay (the council and contractors), lack of local economic growth, renewal of contracts (there are 3 major contracts are for renewal in 2026/27), property, now beyond their useful life – increased maintenance costs, parking and other local fees income, planning and business rates appeals, low growth in population.</p>

	The key opportunities	Investment returns, higher local growth (impacting business rates and additional homes), coworking space income and sharing of costs, capital receipts, targeted savings in costs (with no unintended consequences).
	Long-term action	<p>The Council budgets on a prudent basis. Thus significant increases in income or major savings in expenditure are not seen in budgets until they become reasonably certain - such as coworking designed to reduce costs and produce income. Like most organisations (public and private) ongoing adjustments are always necessary. The prudent long-term forecast in the Budget Strategy Updateⁱⁱⁱ shows a 10% p.a. increase in net costs and a 3% increase p.a. in funding from taxes and grants. Hence it shows increasing deficits, requiring ongoing planning for new and additional income, improvements in productivity and reduced costs.</p> <p>We would like to see these potential plans, which show the possibilities of improved financial position (upside risk), along with the other risk which could cause a deterioration in the Council's financial position (downside risk). Where improvements are achieved in a single year, we would like to see this as an increase in discretionary expenditure for the following year i.e. an improvement in one year would give the ability to spend it in the following year without impacting long-term budget process.</p>
	Auditors	The independent auditors have given positive clean reports over many years regarding the Council's Financial Reports. This year they also stated "It has been two years since the impact of the Pandemic and with income streams now stabilised and with inflation persistently high the Council must set out a savings plan to close the gap between income and expenditure without the use of reserves."

How does this impact taxpayers		A 3% increase in Council tax is assumed. This is below average inflation levels.
	Will taxes and fees rise?	These are assessed during the year for future years (commencing on the following 1 st April). Normally they reflect current general inflation. In 2022/23 some of these rises (car parking charges) were brought forward and implemented in December. Car parking charges were increased in line with general motoring inflation reflecting high increases in fuel costs. Hence these need to be monitored and reviewed as appropriate during the financial year.
	What is the likely impact on RTW town?	Parish and town councils raise additional amounts of council taxes which they are able to spend on items of relevance in their areas. RTW (as the only non-parished area) are covered by 'Special Expenses'. We are investigating the income generated and how these funds are spent. Once completed, a report will be provided to Members of the Town Forum.
	What will happen if Councils are restructured into a unified Council?	The most likely structure will include all of the towns and boroughs of West Kent (Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells). We have a large net worth. We will need to guard that that this wealth is retain for Royal Tunbridge Wells and not assumed into the broader combined authority.
Other sources of income		<i>(Not included in the financial accounts or budgets)</i>
	Parking and traffic fines <i>Must be spent of traffic/road related projects.</i>	For instance, the likely to increase in fines in 2023/24, due to the Mt Pleasant scheme. We need to understand how much is raised and spent to ensure the interests of RTW are taken into account.
	Section 106 money <i>Obtained from developers for infrastructure and other projects related to the development and areas surrounding it.</i>	Substantial amounts are raised, particularly for large projects and those on greenfield sites. These s106 funds need to be identified by us and monitored to encourage expenditure that will benefit RTW residents and businesses.

This report condenses the many financial reports and financial documents produced by the Council. The Working Party will be happy to meet with others who wish to review this report and the details produced by the council. All numbers used have been taken from major reports produced by the Council. The Council will be asked to verify them.

We have identified a wide range of questions and sent these to the Council. Responses to these questions should provide us with a better understanding of decisions taken and their consequences, assessment of reserves, forecasts, and awareness of the downside and upside risks assumed by the Council in the past and future.

Notes:

ⁱ Financial Statements show inflows to the Council as negative figures and outflows as positive. Asset values relate to low valuations of assets in their current use. Hence, for instance, the value of the Town Hall, Assembly Hall or car-parks valuations do not reflect their valuation for any other purpose.

ⁱⁱ Budgets are based on cautious estimates. They are aimed to avoid risk in overspending should less certain income or costs greater than budgeted occur. This is a different approach to many businesses which use budgets to encourage future achievement. This is considered necessary as Councils are less able to react to changes during the financial year. Hence increases in income are not included unless demonstrated by actual receipts.

ⁱⁱⁱ Codebook - spreadsheets (csv files) of detailed transactions summarised by accounting codes

https://tunbridgewells.gov.uk/council/performance-and-spending/transparency-on-spend?root_node_selection=371719&search_page_371761_submit_button=Search

^{iv} Bank of England interest rates have progressively risen from 0.25% Jan 2021, through 12 small steps now reaching 5% July 2023 – which has provided increasing investment income of the substantial funds held.

^v Key Variances <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=37066#mgDocuments> Appendix A

^{vi} Budget projection strategy https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/s65146/Budget%20FC%202023_24%20-%20with%20CT%20premiums.pdf updated with

https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/s67467/FINAL1%20Budget%20Projection%20and%20Strategy%202024_25.pdf