



# A G E N D A

Thursday 25 October 2012 at 6.30 pm  
Council Chamber, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS

## AGM

- 1 **Apologies**
- 2 **Declarations of Members Entitled to Vote**  
A list of Members with entitlements indicated will be circulated at the meeting.  
  
The voting entitlement shall be in accordance with the provisions of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum Constitution.
- 3 **To Receive a Report from the Chairman on the Town Forum's Activities Over the Past Year** (Pages 1 - 4)
- 4 **To Elect a Chairman and Management Committee for 2012/13** (Pages 5 - 6)  
The nominations received have been attached to this agenda.
- 5 **Adoption of Consequential Constitutional Amendment(s)** (Pages 7 - 14)

## Routine Meeting

- 6 **Membership Changes**
  - a Membership applications (for decision).
  - b Changes of representation (for information).
- 7 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 27 September 2012** (Pages 15 - 22)
- 8 **Actions from Previous Meetings**
  - a Chairman's actions (Item 60).
  - b Administrators actions (Items 63 and 65(h)).
- 9 **Breakout Session for Working Groups**
  - a Finance and Other Issues
  - b Planning and Development
  - c Traffic
  - d Leisure, Culture & Tourism
  - e Water in the Wells
- 10 **Any Other Business**

### Date of the Next Meeting

10<sup>th</sup> January 2012



## **Tunbridge Wells Town Forum**

### **Chairman's Report to the 2012 AGM**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The last eighteen months have seen important changes taking place in the Town Forum. The present management structure has been in place since the Spring of 2011, giving us time to think through what our longer term objectives are, and to find the ideal structure to meet those objectives. It has been a busy period!

We started off tidying up ourselves, notably by defining who were and whom we represented. This found expression in the members information pack, issued in the Summer of 2011. We have month by month defined our members entitlement to be present through the rather boring but necessary call at the start of each meeting for the names of those present and the names of substitutes. We think that this is important if we are to avoid the challenges which so upset our meeting some two years ago.

We are greatly heartened by the information collected last month by our officers, showing the wide spread which our membership covers over the Town, starting with the coverage given through residents associations, spreading out to bodies such as the Civic Society, the age related groups such as Royal British Legion and Age Concern, leading beyond the restrictive male boundary seen in so many organisations through the membership here of the Soroptimists, and out to the fringes of our non-parished area, through representatives from Sherwood and Showfields. We can rightly claim to be the voice of the Town.

I have been greatly helped in planning and managing the work of the TF through my excellent steering group, which meets monthly to agree the agenda and plan the forward work schedule. We have tackled such matters as co-ordination with the officers of the Council, over seen the removal of grot spots, called for reports from the groups responsible for the libraries, education, and transport. We have also had some input into the Town Panel report, and have worked alongside Tunbridge Wells in Bloom.

In the past eighteen months we have worked on many problem areas. What comes readily to mind is the consultation on the budget( we gave the green light to a slight increase in council tax), response on empty homes, the line to take on the Kent and Sussex hospital site, and at national level, we were consulted on the National Planning Policy Framework. Indeed, for the last, we were lucky to have present with us in the Town Hall the author of that document, our own MP, answering question!

Despite all this, we not infrequently had the sense that our efforts that our efforts were not being appreciated at the Borough Council.

#### **RE-STRUCTING THE TOWN FORUM**

The problem seemed to be that we were not helping with the issues which TWBC were being asked to solve. Neither on planning (though I would have thought that the Civic Society were doing an excellent job on that front) nor on economic matters( though here the answer must surely lie with the local chamber of commerce). We were told that elected members and officers did not like appearing before us, since they were liable to

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be given a hostile reception. This is why we have looked at a new structure for the TF.

We had several meetings with the Leader, (past and present), putting our own point of view, which essentially was that our membership would not change into an elected body, since we felt that there were already too many layers of local government as it is, and that we had not joined the TF to become local politicians. Canvassing our membership threw up the grumble from many sides, that we had done the work ( typically the excellent “ Getting Around Tunbridge Wells“), but there has been a lack of recognition of our work, especially in areas such as pedestrianisation , parking policy, leisure and tourism.

To some extent the problem arises because we, the TF, have set before TWBC the problems which our members find the most pressing , which are not necessarily the problems which most concern the TWBC. A way had to be found to bridge the gap. After much consultation with you, our members, and with the TWBC, what we have come up with is a new structure for the TF and a new method of working.

The essentials are that, first TWBC puts before us those matters which are of the most immediate concern to them. We already know one of them: the annual budget. But another, which we have recently responded to , is the whole question of Council Tax Benefit. To whom is this to be paid to, how will it be paid for?

On our side, to tackle the problems which have long been at the centre of our townspeople's concern, we have set up five working groups, namely

- Planning and Development
- Traffic Strategy
- Leisure, Culture and Tourism
- Water in the Wells
- Finance and other issues

These working groups will carry the load, meeting when and how they see fit, reporting back to the TF when they have something to report. The TF itself will meet not more than six times a year, to receive reports from the working groups , to respond to requests from TWBC, and will continue at these meetings to act as the Town Forum.

The changes to our constitution are restricted to the number of meetings we are called upon to hold each year. I am delighted to report, that we have already a chairman for four of these working groups, and members for all of them. Town Forum members now need to consider which Working Group they can contribute to most. They will have a chance to display their choice later tonight.

## **THE WORK NOW AHEAD OF US**

It seems clear the TWBC will be asking for more responses on vital matters. The economic sky has darkened, the money available for social causes has shrunk, central government has decided that localism is the way forward. This means that what remains of any money available will be distributed by local organisations, which in turn will call for allocation. The needs remain, but the resources are limited. Not an easy task.

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Whilst that is the pressure we will get from above, from below we will still get calls for the solution to problems which have long faced us, and which will not go away. The working groups will need to see what levers they can pull to get action in their specific areas, being aware all the time of what a local authority can and cannot do. We have a very long way to go in this.

It should not be all doom and gloom. Let us lead our many constituent parts in having fun. The promised Pageant in 2013 offers scope, both to put our name in front of the public (what about a float from each organisation?) and to aid many worthy causes. And there are so many anniversaries coming up, all of which I hope we will take a major part in. I know that we carry very great influence in the Town. We will do our very best to make Tunbridge Wells a fine place to live in.

I conclude with a very warm thank you to the officers of the Borough Council, who have been patient with us, guided us with their experience in what has been a difficult time, and greatly helped in creating the new structure. I also wish to thank my steering group for all the help they have given me these past eighteen months. Jane Fenwick leaves us tonight after doing much heavy lifting on your behalf, and deserves a special vote of thanks.

David Wakefield

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**Statement of Nomination from Mr David Wakefield for the Position of Chairman  
2012/13 -**

I have been a member of the Town Forum since its inception, first as a Councillor and latterly as a member of the resident's group.

I have been Chairman for the last 18 months. I am a member of the Friends of the Museum Library and Art Gallery and the Royal British Legion.

I hope in the coming year to pilot the new structure we have developed, to improve relations with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, to guide the work of the working parties, and to get action on pedestrianisation, increased leisure and tourism provision and planning for the town.

**Statement of Nomination from Mr Michael Doyle for the Position of Deputy Chairman  
2012/13 -**

I would like to deputise for the Chairman during his absence at regular formal meetings of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum, and to scrutinise and examine planning matters as they affect the unparished areas of the town.

I would also like to safeguard and oversee the interests of the residents of the village of Hawkenbury during my year in post.

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## **Constitution of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum**

### **Name**

Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

### **Town Forum's office**

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1RS

### **1. Purpose of the Town Forum**

To enable residents of the unparished area of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells (the Town) to play an active role in localism and shaping the future of the Town, ensuring that their views on Town matters are forcefully conveyed to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) and to Borough Councillors for the unparished areas.

Forum members will normally endeavour to achieve this by:

- assessing issues within, or affecting, the unparished area of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells, and working with other agencies as appropriate to initiate and develop both strategic and operational proposals and recommendations for consideration by, and response from, TWBC, Kent County Council or any other relevant bodies;
- reviewing and responding to consultative documents and proposals from TWBC, or from any other body, that will or may affect the unparished area;
- contributing to the development and implementation of the Sustainable Community Plan as it relates to residents in Royal Tunbridge Wells and working with and informing the Local Strategic Partnership;
- encouraging the establishment of new residents associations in the unparished area;
- encouraging member organisations to contribute their own views additionally outside the Forum process to relevant consultation processes; and by
- working for the benefit of the residents of the unparished area in any way that it sees fit.

### **Support from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council**

Where necessary, the Town Forum's proposals and recommendations will be submitted by the Chairman to representative(s) of TWBC, KCC or any other body on behalf of the Forum. In such cases Councillor Members will be responsible for ensuring that the Town Forum is kept informed both of progress and of opportunities to attend Council and/or other relevant meetings.

### **2. Membership of the Town Forum**

***Core membership of the Forum will comprise:***

- councillors representing constituents in the unparished area of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells;
- Residents' Associations in the unparished area of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells;
- other voluntary or not for profit organisations representing residents' interests which are open to residents of the unparished area but subject to the following conditions:

Any voluntary or not for profit organisation that is able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Chair either that the majority of its membership comprises residents of the unparished area or that one of its main purposes is to work in the interests of residents of the Town may apply to become a member of the Forum.

Alternatively, the Town Forum may, by majority vote, allow organisations which cannot satisfy these criteria to become members of the Town Forum under whatever conditions may be considered by the Forum to be desirable.

Residents' associations or other organisations wishing to be considered for membership should apply in the first place to the Town Forum Chair or Secretary. Applications must include a statement giving reasons for wishing to join and a statement of the aims and objectives of the organisation, together with an indication of the size and residence status of their membership.

### ***Representatives of Town Forum member organisations***

Member organisations must nominate ONE named representative who is entitled to attend the Town Forum and speak on their behalf. A second named representative who is authorised to deputise in all matters for the first named representative may be nominated.

The Town Forum may co-opt individuals with particular knowledge, skills, expertise and/or interest or may invite individuals and/or organisations to attend particular meetings where appropriate to the agenda. In addition, officers of TWBC and other bodies may be asked to present material, give guidance or to respond to enquiries from the Town Forum. Neither co-optees nor invitees shall have voting rights.

The Town Forum shall be open, transparent, apolitical and accountable; it shall ensure that all interests have a voice where necessary and that hard to reach groups are appropriately represented and engaged.

### ***Others in attendance***

On occasions other residents of the unparished area of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells may wish to attend and they are welcome to do so but must first register their presence with the Town Forum Secretary. They have no right to vote but may, at the discretion of the Chair, speak and ask a specific question.

### **3. Voting entitlement**

#### ***Member Organisations***

At General or Extraordinary General Meetings (EGM) each attending member organisation and Borough Councillor shall be entitled to a single vote.

In order to secure entitlement to a vote at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) for executive positions or on membership proposals which have been brought to the Forum at a General or Extraordinary General Meeting it is an absolute requirement that one or other named representative of the member organisation should have attended a ~~combined~~ total of at least ~~four~~ 50 percent of possible meetings that could have been attended in the previous twelve months. This percentage shall be pro rata for organisations joining partway through the year. The minutes of the Forum's meetings will be taken as conclusive evidence of this attendance.

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### **Councillor members**

Councillor members are each entitled to a single vote at both General and Extraordinary General Meetings but to be eligible to vote at the AGM they must have attended at least ~~four~~ 50 percent of possible meetings that could have been attended in the previous twelve months. This percentage shall be pro rata for Councillors elected and joining partway through the year (through a by-election for example). The minutes of the Forum's meetings will be taken as conclusive evidence of this attendance.

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## **4. Role and reporting responsibilities of Town Forum Members**

Representatives of Town Forum member associations are expected to:

- represent the views of their ward/association or membership organisation and to report back to them any developments and initiatives of the Town Forum; and
- identify ways in which their members can contribute to the work of the Town Forum.

In order to ensure compliance with the above reporting responsibilities representatives of Forum members shall:

- provide a statement of the aims of their member organisations and re-confirm annually;
- demonstrate communication between themselves and the members of their organisations – this may be by copies of newsletters, or of meeting minutes, or any other mechanism appropriate to each member organisation; and
- submit to the Town Forum Secretary a copy of the Annual General Meeting minutes, or similar, at which the named Forum representative(s) was/were authorised to attend the Forum on behalf of the membership organisation.

A list of member organisations, representatives and officers of the Town Forum and its sub-groups is available from the Secretary and is published on the Town Forum's website, [www.townforum.org.uk](http://www.townforum.org.uk).

## **5. Management of the Town Forum**

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The Town Forum shall be administered by a Management Committee of three officers elected at the AGM. The Officers of the Management Committee shall be:

- the Chair, who must be a named representative of a member residents' association; and
- two Deputy Chairs, at least one of whom must be a named representative from a member residents' association.

The Chair and both Deputy Chairs shall be elected annually and will only be eligible to serve a maximum of two terms in any one office unless a majority of eligible voting Forum members agree to allow a further term of office. It is not intended that a Deputy Chair will automatically become Chair.

The Management Committee may co-opt onto the Committee (for up to one year in an advisory and non-voting capacity) up to three other members of the Town Forum whom it considers will help to fulfil the aims of, or have some valuable expertise to contribute to, the Town Forum.

The Management Committee shall meet at least four times a year and at least three members, including the Chair and one deputy must be present in order that a Management Committee meeting may take place. Voting at Management Committee meetings shall be by a show of hands, and if there is a tied vote then the Chair shall have a second vote.

The Management Committee shall have the power, by majority vote, to recommend the removal of any member of the Committee for good and proper reason. The reasons for the removal shall be given to Town Forum members at the next available Town Forum meeting.

## 5a Working Groups

Working groups will take ownership of specific issues and projects as decided by the Town Forum chairman and management committee. These Working Groups will reflect the strategic direction of the Town Forum at that time, and will change in scope and membership over time.

Working Groups will comprise a chairman and at least four others comprising Town Forum Members and non-parished area Councillors. An ideal Working Group size will be five. Other persons from Town Forum membership organisations and wider population in Tunbridge Wells, may be co-opted to contribute expertise as decided by the chairman of the Working Group. The Town Forum chairman and vice chairmen may also sit on working groups to monitor progress and facilitate co-ordination.

The Working Group chairman will be responsible for ensuring progress on the issues at hand, liaise with the Town Forum chairman, and will report to the Town Forum for each plenary meeting.

Working groups will undertake research, write reports and draft consultation responses and speak to relevant officials and interested parties on specific areas of interest. They will keep the Town Forum membership informed (primarily by email) of progress and seek their input into their work.

The output of working groups will be that of the Town Forum and therefore the Town Forum chairman and management committee will have final approval before submission or publication.

## 6. Duties of the Officers

The Chairman supported by two vice chairmen will:

1. Establish priorities for the Town Forum and set clear outcomes
2. Support, encourage and co-ordinate the work of the Working Groups to ensure the development of constructive proposals from the Town Forum

3. Secure representation from all areas of the town not already represented or engaged in the Town Forum
4. Promote the collective voice of the Town Forum to the wider public in Tunbridge Wells through print media, the Town Forum website and social media
5. Regularly liaise with TWBC staff, TWBC Leader and Councillors on matters of interest to the Town Forum and seek from them and provide to them more information relevant to the un-parished area; encourage greater engagement with Councillors of the un-parished areas.
6. Encourage Town Forum members to work together on common issues, and promote greater accountability of Town Forum representatives with their member organisations.
7. Chair Plenary meetings of the Town Forum.

In addition, where one is not provided for this purpose by TWBC, the Chair of the Forum will appoint a Secretary who will not be a part of the Management Committee. The duties of the Secretary shall be to:

- keep a list of member organisations, their two nominated representatives and their attendance record;
- prepare, in consultation with the Chair, the agenda for meetings of the Committee and the Forum;
- take and keep minutes of all meetings;
- collect and circulate relevant information within the Forum;
- provide relevant information for uploading to the Town Forum website; and
- facilitate communication with relevant TWBC officers.

## **7. Meetings of the Town Forum**

### ***Annual General Meeting***

The Forum shall hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM), normally in October.

All member organisations shall be given at least three weeks' notice of the AGM and shall be entitled to attend and vote in accordance with the section in the Constitution above entitled **Voting entitlement**. Notice of AGM and EGM will include notice of motions and will be provided either in writing or electronically according to the preferred means of the individual representative.

The business of the AGM shall include:

- receiving a report from the Chair on the Town Forum's activities over the year;
- electing a Management Committee; and
- considering any other matters including normal agenda items as may be required.

At least one third of nominated representatives who satisfy the voting entitlement requirements must be present for the Annual General Meeting, or any other General or Extraordinary General Meeting, to take place.

## ***Election process***

Election of the management committee at the AGM shall be by secret ballot; the elections shall be chaired by a member of the Management Committee who is not standing for an executive position. If no such person is available, then by majority vote of eligible voting representatives an Election Chair will be agreed from among Town Forum members. In the event of a tied vote the Election Chair shall have the casting vote.

Nominations for the Chair and Deputy Chair positions must be submitted to the Secretary at least two weeks before the AGM and must be accompanied by a short statement setting out what they want to achieve during their period of office. The statement will be circulated to Forum members prior to the AGM along with the agenda. Candidates for the officer posts will be announced at the AGM and shall be formally proposed and seconded at the AGM by representatives entitled to vote in the election. Each candidate will be asked to present a short overview of their objectives for their putative term of office.

## ***General Meetings***

There shall be not more than six plenary meetings, including the AGM each year; all members shall be entitled to attend and vote in accordance with the section in the Constitution above entitled **Voting entitlement**.

## ***Extraordinary General Meeting***

An Extraordinary General Meeting may be called by the Management Committee or by a minimum of fifteen Forum member organisations to discuss an urgent matter. The Secretary shall give all member organisations fourteen days notice of any Extraordinary General Meeting together with notice of the business to be discussed. All members shall be entitled to attend and vote in accordance with the section in the Constitution above entitled **Voting entitlement**.

## **8. Servicing of the Town Forum**

TWBC shall provide administrative support and make facilities available to the Town Forum for meetings.

## **9. Publicity**

Dates, agendas and minutes of meetings shall be posted on the Town Forum website

## **10. Timing and Location of Town Forum Meetings**

The Town Forum will endeavour to ensure that meetings are held at a convenient time and in a place easily accessible for its members.

## **11. Changes to the Constitution**

Changes to this Constitution can only be made at an AGM or EGM and must be agreed by at least two-thirds of those eligible representatives present.

## 12. **Dissolution**

The Forum may be wound up at any time if agreed by two-thirds of those eligible representatives present and voting at any AGM or EGM.

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## ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Thursday 27 September 2012

**Attended:** Cllr Bob Backhouse, Lorna Blackmore, Stephen Bowser (sub), David Bushell (sub), John Cunningham, Michael Doyle, Helen Featherstone, Jane Fenwick, Maggie Fraser, Tim Harper, Dorothea Holman, Michael Holman, Jim Kedge, Kyrios Kyriacou, George Lawson, Katharina Mahler-Bech, Cllr Mrs Mayhew, John Mattei, Marguerita Morton, Altan Omer, Peter Perry, Kate Sergeant, Anne Stobo, David Wakefield (Chairman), Mary Wardrop, Philip Whitbourn and Cllr Frank Williams

TWBC officers present: Adam Chalmers (Democratic and Community Engagement Manager) and Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer)

### 55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from: Sally Balcon, Ian Beavis, June Bridgeman, Betsey Dix, John Forster, Léonie Harrington, Sue Kaner, J Paul Lambert, Stephen Marshall, Angela Phillips, Margaret Watts, Victor Webb, David Webster and Councillors Basu, Bulman, Derrick, Poile, Scholes, Scott and Mrs Weatherly.

### 56. DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following declarations of substitute attendance were made: Stephen Bowser for Jenina Pendry; David Bushell for Angela Phillips; and John Cunningham for John Forster.

### 57. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Mike McGeary advised that: (a) Christopher Thomas had withdrawn the Woodbury Close Residents' Association from membership of the Town Forum; and (b) Steve Marshall had resigned as the representative for the Pantiles Traders.

### 58. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2012 be agreed.

### 59. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

26 July 2012

48(43) The use of Borough Council parks

*DW The Chairman and Jane Fenwick to raise the principle with TWBC of the Forum being involved in formal discussions regarding the use of town centre parks.*

The Chairman and Jane Fenwick confirmed that this had taken place, adding that the discussion had been held with the Cabinet portfolio-holder responsible, namely Cllr March.

52 The former Kent and Sussex Hospital site

This was the subject of a substantive item on the agenda and appears under minute 62 below.

## 60. LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

The Chairman welcomed Steve McGinnes, TWBC's Head of Revenues and Benefits, and Nick Saunders, TWBC's Assistant Benefits Manager, to the meeting, to provide the Town Forum with an explanation of changes to the existing council tax benefit scheme. The current scheme, it was noted, supported approximately 7,000 households in the Borough, with an average annual sum of £876 per household.

The Forum learnt that, from 1 April 2013, all local authorities were required to have a locally-determined scheme in place. Whereas the existing scheme was fully-funded by central government, the proposal was that locally-determined schemes would have to be funded by each authority, who would receive a central government grant, which would be premised upon a 10% saving on the existing cost. In addition, there was a requirement that pensioners would be protected from any reduction in their current level of support, meaning that the focus would have to be on recipients of working age. The impact of this cut, the Forum was told, fell largely upon KCC, the Police and the Fire and Rescue Service, with only 10% of the existing Government subsidy for council tax benefit being retained by the Borough Council.

The Forum members were also advised that the new scheme formed part of the Government's welfare reforms by encouraging people back to work.

Mr Saunders stated that the Borough Council was currently consulting on two options as to how to implement a local scheme, namely:

- (a) Reduce benefit awards by 25% - TWBC would calculate the benefit in the same way as the current national benefits system but reduce the final award by 25%; this cut would be needed in order to cover the funding shortfall, largely due to the protection provided for pensioners. (The average loss per household would amount to a sum of £219 per annum.);
- (b) Reduce benefit awards by 18.5% and reduce discounts for empty and second homes - again, TWBC would calculate the benefit according to the national scheme but reduce the final benefit award by 18.5%; TWBC would also reduce the discount available to owners of empty properties from six months to three and bring an end to the 10% discount awarded to people with second homes. (The average loss per household would amount to a sum of £162 per annum.)

Mr Saunders added that option (b) above would follow a co-ordinated approach across the county, which was being discussed in detail amongst colleagues in Kent.

Mr Saunders advised that the current consultation process was due to end on 8 October, after which the Cabinet would decide which option it wished the Council to adopt, for the full Council to determine on 12 December. It was noted that the legislative process had still not been completed.

The topic raised a large number of questions from Forum members, to which Mr Saunders and Mr McGinnes responded, as follows:

- (i) Was the protection provided for pensioners mandatory? Yes

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- (ii) Was TWBC committed to matching the county approach towards a new scheme? There were clear benefits in adopting a consistent approach, but some local flexibility would be applied.
- (iii) Had TWBC considered: (a) reducing the council tax-free period given to landlords with empty homes to nil; and (b) penalising owners of second homes with a higher council tax liability? There was a need to be both realistic and fair to landlords (to provide time for improvements to be made in between lets, for instance) but, from April 2013, there was an option to levy an additional premium on owners of long term empty homes. There was the added factor that, if an authority adopted a punitive council tax regime, unintended consequences might make it very difficult to predict income levels.
- (iv) Was the existing 25% single person discount mandatory? Yes
- (v) What were TWBC's predictions for any increase or decrease in take up of council tax benefit? Nationally, the Office for Budgetary Responsibility had predicted a 2.3% fall for 2013; locally, the prediction was for a 1.3% increase in uptake.
- (vi) To what extent was there practical support being provided for low income families? The Revenues and Benefits team was not resourced to provide anything other than advice as to how the changes would impact on an individual's benefit entitlement; beyond that, people were signposted to advice agencies such as the CAB on how they can better deal with financial management or debt.
- (vii) Apart from the three options set out, what consideration had been given to a mix of measures, to reduce the impact on qualifying households? Other options were being examined, e.g. no back-dating of claims or reducing the qualifying capital holding threshold of £16k.
- (viii) Due to the difficulty in assessing the impact of changes for householders, should the Council not commit itself to a long term scheme at this point, but wait and see and review after 12 months? A review process will take place during each of the first three years of a locally-determined scheme.
- (ix) Had thought been given to the likelihood of 'benefit shopping' occurring, i.e. moving to areas where the benefit cuts are less severe? It was not anticipated that the small differences between Kent authorities, for instance, would lead to benefit shopping.

In conclusion, the Chairman invited any interested Forum member to join him in preparing a response to the consultation on behalf of the whole group. Cllr Bob Backhouse undertook to assist.

Finally, Michael Holman proposed that any response submitted should start with the preamble that Tunbridge Wells expresses its disapproval that one of the consequences of changes to the national council tax benefit scheme is that the Government would be shielded from the inevitable criticism and flak, with local authorities bearing the full brunt.

**Action** – The Chairman and Cllr Bob Backhouse to prepare a response to TWBC's consultation on this issue, taking account of the views expressed at the meeting.

## 61. FUTURE ROLE OF THE TOWN FORUM

The Chairman presented a report, setting out proposals for the future operation of the Town Forum, based upon the responses submitted by representatives, which had been discussed at the July meeting.

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The Chairman drew attention to the importance of the five working groups in ensuring the Town Forum developed its effectiveness. In each case, once a working group had examined a specific issue and worked up its recommendations, it would require the endorsement of the full Town Forum before implementation.

Adam Chalmers, TWBC's Democratic and Community Engagement Manager, added that the remits of the five working groups lent themselves well to the 'sounding board' role the Borough Council envisaged for the Town Forum. He gave the examples of the following TWBC consultation issues, which would link with the working groups' activities as follows:

The Local Plan (formerly the Local Development Framework) – due in January – Planning & Development Strategy Working Group

Transport Strategy – about to go before the Joint Transportation Board of TWBC and KCC members – Traffic Strategy Working Group

Leisure and Culture Strategy – forming part of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group

The Council's budget and Corporate Plan (Strategic Compass) – Finance and Other Issues Working Group

The Chairman welcomed this approach and invited as many representatives as possible to volunteer to be part of the working groups.

In response to a question as to who would be chairing each of the working groups, the Chairman advised as follows:

Finance and Other Issues – David Wakefield  
Planning and Development Strategy – Michael Doyle  
Water in the Wells – Michael Holman

That left the Traffic Strategy and the Leisure, Culture and Tourism working groups as still requiring a chairman to be appointed.

No further comments were made in respect of the recommended future working arrangements for the Town Forum.

**Action** – All Town Forum members to make contact with the Chairman if they would like to be a member of any of the working groups.

## 62. THE FORMER KENT AND SUSSEX HOSPITAL SITE

Michael Doyle reported upon the outcome of his attendance – along with other Town Forum members – at an exhibition run by Berkeley Homes on their proposals for the redevelopment of the former Kent and Sussex Hospital site.

Michael emphasised that he had studied the details of the outline proposal, as well as all of the supporting documentation, and believed that all of the previous concerns about the redevelopment of the site had been answered. In particular, he advised on the following aspects: the number of dwellings proposed had been reduced from 465 to 243; a free school formed part of the scheme details (with the school hall available as a wider community recreation facility); there would be two vehicular entrances on to the site with, importantly, no opportunity to use it as a

'rat run'; the site would be well-landscaped; there would be a 35% affordable housing provision (for elderly people); and there were three water features planned.

Based upon that improved position, Michael advised that he did not believe there remained a need for the Town Forum to call for a planning forum. This view was supported.

## 63. THE FORTHCOMING AGM

The Chairman drew attention to the following aspects of the Town Forum's AGM, due to take place on 25 October:

- (a) **Attendance and voting:** he reminded members that the Constitution stated that representatives and/or their substitutes must have attended at least four meetings since the last AGM to be able to vote at the Annual Meeting. He asked that anyone in doubt about their voting position should contact Mike McGeary at the Town Hall (contact details can be found on any agenda);
- (b) **Groups joining part-way during year:** the Chairman sought Forum members' views on what level of attendance was appropriate from representatives and/or substitutes of groups that had joined part-way during the year. It was agreed that 50% of possible attendances should have been achieved, in order to be able to vote at the AGM;
- (c) **Number of attendances at Town Forum meetings, 2012/13:** the Chairman advised that, with the agreed change to the working arrangements for the Forum, the AGM would be asked to consider what number of attendances was felt to be appropriate across the year, to enable members to vote at future AGMs;
- (d) **Town Forum management committee:** finally, the Chairman reminded members that voting for a Chairman and two other members of the Forum's management committee would take place on 25 October. He added that the Constitution stated that nominations for the Chairman and the two Deputy Chairmen positions had to be submitted to the Secretary at least two weeks before the AGM, (i.e. by Thursday 11 October). It was agreed that Mike McGeary would send an e-mail to all members, to remind them of the procedure and deadline.

Michael Holman emphasised the importance of viewing Deputy Chairmen as aspiring towards, longer term, being Chairmen of the Forum. Finally under this item, the Chairman advised that Jane Fenwick, one of the current Deputy Chairmen, would be standing down from that role at the AGM.

**Action:** Mike McGeary to contact all Town Forum members, to set out the procedure and deadline date for nominations to become Chairman and Deputy Chairmen of the Forum.

## 64. THE WATER IN THE WELLS WORKING GROUP

Michael Holman, the Chairman of the above working group, provided a summary of progress.

He advised that a number of presentations had been made to various groups, including the Mayor, the Chief Executive and Cabinet members of TWBC. The feedback, Michael advised, had been very positive.

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A presentation had also been made to the Water in the Wells Working Group by a company that specialises in producing water features.

Michael added that one of the key aspects currently being pursued was the establishment of a legal structure which would enable funds to be raised in support of the provision of a water feature. Forum members had earlier expressed much satisfaction that Berkeley Homes had included provision for a water feature as part of their scheme.

Future presentations included: (a) John Cunningham, to the Civic Society; and (b) Michael Holman to the Friends of Calverley Grounds.

Bearing in mind the town's key image of 'water and health', Michael Holman expressed disappointment that the Chalybeate Spring on the Pantiles remained closed.

In thanking Michael for his update report, the Chairman stated that this provided a good example of how a working group could work effectively towards achieving its aims, which he hoped could be replicated by all such groups under the new working arrangements.

## 65. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- (a) Maggie Fraser advised the group that the following day was the **International Day of Older People**, which would be celebrated by an event at the Camden Centre, from 11am to 2.30pm, to which all were welcome;
- (b) Tim Harper advised that there was concern amongst the residents of Camden Park relating to a consultation proposal produced by **AXA/PPP** for an expansion of their existing site at Hawkenbury. The plans, he added, were to provide an additional 2,000 sq.m. of office space, to provide employment for up to 300 more staff. He asked that the Forum take note of this proposal which, because of its scale, had implications for the town.

Michael Doyle advised that he had been aware of this proposal, adding that the TWBC planning officer responsible for this area, Nancy Redgrove, had undertaken to advise him further, once a formal planning application had been submitted. Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew expressed concern about the need to preserve employment space in the town centre and therefore urged the Town Forum to maintain a close watch on how this issue developed.

- (c) Cllr Mrs Catherine Mayhew reported that one of the key pieces of work which her Overview and Scrutiny Committee was undertaking this year was on how Tunbridge Wells could establish itself as a **cultural centre**. She cited the example of Canterbury which, over a period of a decade, had achieved the same position for East Kent, adding that she intended to invite someone from that authority to address her Committee at their next meeting. Cllr Mrs Mayhew stressed the importance of the synergy which would exist between the work of her Committee and the Leisure, Culture and Tourism Working Group of the Town Forum. The Chairman asked that Cllr Mrs Mayhew keep the Forum updated on progress;
- (d) Anne Stobo reported that the Friends of the Museum, in conjunction with TWBC and others, had sponsored a prize of £100, awarded to a young person who best met the challenge of how to **promote cultural activities** in the town. She added that the award ceremony would take place on 19 October, and she

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stressed the pride the Friends felt in establishing such a strong link with creative young people through this initiative;

- (e) Michael Holman enquired what progress had been made towards the provision of a **lift within the Museum/Library**. The Chairman advised that, after several delays in progressing this scheme, he understood that contracts were due to be signed very shortly, with implementation before the year-end;
- (f) Michael Holman advised that the **Wiesbaden Girls' Choir** would be performing at Kent College on Monday 15 October, adding that those interested in attending should contact Judith Bearne at the College direct;
- (g) Adam Chalmers drew attention to the map that had been placed on display that evening in the foyer, which charted which areas of the town were represented on the Town Forum; he invited members to comment on the information provided. Mr Chalmers also advised that some interesting results had been found when the Council had applied what was known as '**mosaic profiling**' to the Forum membership, in terms of the social groupings represented by the membership. This, he added, would be distributed to all members, once the work was complete;
- (h) Michael Doyle enquired if there were any progress to be reported on the demolition of the **cinema site**. While there was no verbal update to be shared at the meeting, it was agreed that Mike McGeary would investigate and report back.

## 66. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman reminded members that the next meeting was the AGM, taking place on Thursday 25 October at 6.30pm. He added that he had asked the Secretary to examine ways in which to avoid clashes of dates with Council meetings, to ensure that ward members would be free to attend, including the option to look at day time Town Forum meetings, if that were an option favoured by most Forum members.

The meeting concluded at 7.55pm.

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