

## ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

### Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 27 November 2019 held at Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent starting at 6.30pm

**Members:** Sally Balcon (Friends of the Commons), Tim Ball (Calverley Park Crescent Association), Jenina Bas-Pendry (Dudley Road Residents' Association), Adrian Berendt (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group), Lorna Blackmore (Grantley Court Residents' Association), Mark Booker (Culverden Residents' Association), Diana Butler (Banner Farm Residents' Association), Robert Chris (Grove Hill House Residents' Association), John Cunningham (Warwick Park Residents' Association and Civic Society of Royal Tunbridge Wells), Marieke de Jonge (Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth), Andy England (Tunbridge Wells Access Group), Margaret Ginman (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery), Carolyn Gray (The Forum), Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents' Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), Delphine Houlton (Hawkenbury Village Association), Adrian Johnson (Kingswood Residents' Association), Marianne MacDonald (Nourish Community Foodbank), Katharina Mahler-Bech (Telephone House Neighbours' Association), Paul Mason (Tunbridge Wells Bicycle User Group), Angela McPherson (Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District), Chris Morris (Beulah Road Residents' Association), Paul Sinclair (Clarence Road Users' Association), Don Sloan (Molyneux Park Gardens Residents' Association), Anne Stobo (Friends of the Tunbridge Wells Museum, Library and Art Gallery), Tim Tempest (The Avenues Residents' Association), Alastair Tod (Poona Road Residents' Association and Tunbridge Wells Puppetry Festival), David Wakefield (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), Denise Watts (Tunbridge Wells Over Fifties Forum), Philip Whitbourn (Beulah Road Residents' Association) and Carol Wilson (Inner London Road Residents' Association)

**Borough Councillors:** Councillors Cobbold (Broadwater ward), Lidstone (St. John's ward), Morton (St. John's ward), Pound (Sherwood ward), Scott (Culverden ward) and Woodward (Broadwater ward)

**Others in Attendance:** Stephen Baughen (Head of Planning, TWBC), Sue Pound, Paul Taylor (Director of Change and Communities, TWBC), Mark O'Callaghan (Scrutiny and Engagement Officer, TWBC and Secretary to the Town Forum)

### APOLOGIES

- 1 Apologies were received from Dave Barnett (Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Parks), John de Lucy (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery) and Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Residents' Association).

### VOTING ENTITLEMENT FOR MEMBER ORGANISATIONS AND COUNCILLORS

- 2 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 2018 AGM

- 3 The Secretary noted that the minutes had been agreed in principal at the meeting in January 2019 but were submitted here for formal approval.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the AGM held on 22 November 2018 be approved.

## CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

- 4 The Chairman gave his report, a copy of which is appended to these minutes.

## ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- 5 The Secretary introduced the report set out in the agenda. The following nominations had been received:
- Adrian Berendt – Chairman
  - Alastair Tod – Deputy Chairman
  - Don Sloan – Deputy Chairman

The Vice Chairman took the chair for the election of the Chairman and called for a proposer and seconder for the nominee. This being Adrian Berendt's fourth term as Chairman the consent of the meeting would be required.

Mark Booker proposed, and David Wakefield seconded, that Adrian Berendt be elected Chairman. The vote was carried.

The Chairman resumed the chair for the election of the Deputy Chairmen and called for proposers and seconds for the nominees. This being Alastair Tod's third term as Deputy Chairman the consent of the meeting would be required. This would be Don Sloan's first term.

Adrian Berendt proposed, and John Cunningham seconded, that Alastair Tod be elected Deputy Chairman. The vote was carried.

David Wakefield proposed, and Katherina Mahler-Bech seconded, that Don Sloan be elected Deputy Chairman. The vote was carried.

## RESOLVED –

- 1) That Adrian Berendt be elected Chairman for 2019/20 until the date of the AGM 2020;
- 2) That Alastair Tod be elected Deputy Chairman for 2019/20 until the date of the AGM 2020; and
- 3) That Don Sloan be elected Deputy Chairman for 2019/20 until the date of the AGM 2020.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 6.55pm.



*The voice of the residents of Royal Tunbridge Wells*

## **Town Forum AGM – Chair’s report 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

How time flies. In thinking about what I should say tonight, for my 3<sup>rd</sup> annual report – remember that chairs are only supposed to be appointed for 2 years – so much seems to have happened.

I am about to make a prediction about next year, so I won’t be accused of 2020 hindsight (the sharper witted of you will note the clever pun). This is not to make political point, but to illustrate a point I made last year about the parallels between Brexit and Calverley Square. Whatever happens on 12<sup>th</sup> December, Brexit will not be done on 31<sup>st</sup> January. Just as that’s the easy bit in settling our relationship with Europe, having made a firm decision about what NOT to do, TWBC councillors now they (and we) need to come up with a solution of what IS going to happen. I am happy to say that there is progress on that front – more later – but there’s still a huge amount of work needed.

Last year I also said how much I regretted the tone of the debate about Calverley Square and I spoke about how discussion within the Town Forum had been much more measured – expressing support for the objectives and ambition but raising concerns about specifics. As a result of that stance, I was pleased to lead a non-political team of volunteers to make suggestions about a way forward. We submitted that report to the Borough Council at the end of the summer. I have reason to believe that its suggestions were welcomed as, following the rejection of the Calverley Square plan, I was invited to attend a series of cross-party meetings to discuss possible alternatives. The title belies the style of the work going on, because none of the parties are particularly cross. In fact, there is a remarkable degree of agreement. So much so, that I am sometimes reminded of the last sentence from *Animal Farm*.

*The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.*

I am not suggesting that some of the councillors are the said animals, just that there seems to be unanimity amongst former foes.

As I have said on many occasions, it is the role of the Town Forum to raise concerns, to ask questions and to make suggestions. To be a critical friend to our elected representatives. It is up to Borough and County Councillors as elected representatives to decide whether to take notice.

We really appreciate the time that Borough Councillors give to spend yet another evening in the Town Hall, but I’d rather hoped for better attendance. Those that do come always tell

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Formed in 2005, the Town Forum is the voice of the 50,000 residents of Royal Tunbridge Wells on issues of common interest

### **Town Forum Management Group**

Adrian Berendt (Chair); Alex Green (Deputy Chair); Alastair Tod (Deputy Chair); David Wakefield (Finance); Jane Fenwick (Transport); Linda Lewis (Culture, Leisure & Tourism); Mark Booker (Strategic Planning); Michael Holman (Water in the Wells)

me how useful the meetings are – often more so that Full Council meetings! I emphasise that local County Councillors are welcome, whether as members or as observers.

	Attendances	Total possible	Rate			
Broadwater	5	12	42%			
Culverden	5	18	28%	(all one councillor)		
Pantiles & St Mark's	4	18	22%	(3 by one councillor, now left)		
Park	4	18	22%	(3 by one councillor)		
Sherwood	3	18	17%	(2 by one (new) councillor)		
St James's	1	12	8%			
St John's	7	18	39%			
	29	114	25%			

The Town Forum now has 51 member organisations, 44 of whom attended at least one meeting in the year and 9 attended all meetings. We had an attendance rate of 70% this year, which is remarkable. My thanks to you all, not just for attending, but for all your positive contributions. We welcomed 4 new members in the year

Dudley Road Residents' Association

Molyneux Park Road Residents' Association

Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth

Tunbridge Wells Dementia Friendly Community

and didn't lose any, although there are 4 or 5 about whose existence I am uncertain.

I am also aware of another couple of organisations in the pipeline. But we need more, particularly in the less well-represented parts of town. I had planned to hold at least one of meetings outside of the Town Hall in 2019. We need to go that in 2020.

The effort and expertise contributed by so many in the Town Forum is fantastic. Not just the working group chairs, although that is immense, but the members who voluntarily put in hours and hours of unpaid, but I hope not unrewarded, effort. These groups are where the work of the TF really happens, but we need more volunteers.

Linda Lewis is stepping down from leadership of our culture leisure and tourism working group. Someone wanted that renamed Tourism, Leisure and Culture, or TLC as it should more properly be. I don't know how Linda found time to be chair while masterminding this year's brilliant puppetry festival. Work has continued, of course on the Calverley Square project as well as the Emilia Scott cultural centre and we are indebted to both Linda and to Alex Green for their professional expertise, as well as all the other members of the group.

A lot of the controversy over Calverley Square has been about money and, with new plans being considered, I know that David Wakefield's Finance Working Group will continue to have its work cut out to scrutinise the Borough's income and spending plans over the coming 12 months.

I spoke last year about whether the efforts of Mark Booker and his Strategic Planning Group were making a difference to the shape of the Local Plan, which provide the bulk of the work this year. Whether or not it was due to the Town Forum's contribution, a lot of our recommendations do seem to have found their way into the published Plan. If you have read the Town Forum's input, you will appreciate the monumental scale of Mark's effort.

Not only has he managed to paint a big picture of the messages that we wanted to get across, he has gone into an inordinate amount of detail. I hope that other members of the management group won't mind me 'marking' him out for a special mention this year.

In the previous year (2017-18) Mark and his group were involved with the Public Realm phase 2 and I am pleased that we will talk about that a bit later tonight. Maybe I could remind you of my words last year.

*"Our response to the Public Realm phase 2 has been less well-received. The original designs envisaged a new square in the middle of the town, something of which we could all be proud. As far as I can see, the latest design is little more than a slight narrowing of the road and a better view of the War Memorial. Both are welcome, but, in my views, don't justify the cost."*

Looking at it today, I'm not sure that I would want to change much of that. It is a definite improvement, but I still feel it is an opportunity missed to have done something more dramatic.

At last year's TF AGM, Alastair Tod indicated his wish to stand down. I am delighted that he didn't really mean it. We co-opted him back on the management group anyway and he is standing this year as Deputy Chair again. Thank you so much for all your work in the working groups Alastair and your personal help to me.

It is an accolade to Michael Holman's Water in the Wells Group that he is the subject of Mary Harris's column in this week's Courier. Well done Michael. The theme of water seems to be a sine qua non in new developments and I am confident that progress is being made for more public art at Fiveways.

I'm also delighted that we have recruited Marianna MacDonald to lead the health and wellbeing group. The work that they and the Sorooptimists did on auditing benches in the town was outstanding and really useful. Those amongst us who are readily able to walk (or cycle) everywhere underestimate the value of benches for those that need a breather every so often. The difference between someone being able to walk home or catch a bus / cab might well be a bench on Grosvenor Hill...one that has been lost over time. I look forward to seeing more benches around town

The list of topics discussed by Jane Fenwick and her Transport Working Group continues to lengthen. As well as attending and speaking at most JTB meetings, the working group has responded to numerous consultations, most notably and recently, the transport parts of the Local Plan. Again, it is a testament to Jane's input, that the mentions of transport in the Local Plan are so positive.

The groups have also contributed to the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, due to be submitted by the Brough Council this week. We performed an audit of the walking routes into town. The results confirmed what we probably already knew. Walking into the centre of Tunbridge Wells is a challenge – broken bricks, lack of road crossings, high volumes of fast traffic. No wonder that 12 pedestrians have been knocked over in the past 12 months in our town.

I remind you of the TfL report on the positive impact walking and cycling and public realm improvements which can increase sales on the High Street by 30%. Such interventions led to a fall vacancy rates of 17% and a rise in retail rental values by 7.5%. Over a month, people who walk to the high street spend 40% more. If anyone is in any doubt, a survey from a London Borough reported that 63% of businesses thought that their customers arrived by car, against just 20% of customers said actually did so.

What else? RTW in Bloom – yet more success . Thanks to Katharina in particular – we’ll hear the details of all the Gold and Silver medals from you later.

Two highlights for me from the same meeting. Dr Stephen Peckham on the shocking state of air in Kent - much worse than we imagined, followed by students from schools talking about climate change. They were so eloquent, and we can learn a lot from them. So much so that I look forward to setting up a Youth Town Forum next year.

What else for Next year? More work on the Local Plan, particularly the transport aspects; and more on the alternative to Calverley Square. I am particularly pleased to announce that the cabinet has agreed to make one of its members – David Scott – responsible for liaison with the Town Forum. This puts us on a more equal footing with parish councils, about which I am delighted.

The Town Forum remains as relevant as ever. As I said last year, long may it continue to be a channel for unbiased information, a fake news free zone. But we need more help. We need more people to join the Forum and to volunteer time on the working groups.

Finally, an apology and a few thanks.

If I have forgotten to mention something, or someone, I’m really sorry. There are simply too many great things to talk about and I started writing this speech at about 4pm today!

Special thanks to the members of the management group, who put up with my whims and my lack of organisation and without whom the Town Forum would simply not function.

Secondly, Katharina Mahler-Bech, who maintains our website and social media accounts. We have a twitter account and there are frequent posts about relevant information. As of 2 hours ago, we were at 769 followers, a 20% increase on last year. Well done Katharina. The hashtag is simple... it’s @townforum.

Thank you to William Benson and his team for their continued support of the Town Forum. The level of engagement with the Town Forum from the Borough Council has been excellent this year and a positive improvement on previous years. I hope and believe that the TF’s input has been useful. There has been quite a lot of change within Democratic services, but I’m delighted that Mark O’Callaghan has [been] volunteered to help the Town Forum. It’s only been a couple of months, Mark, but you are already making a positive difference. Long may it continue.

My biggest thanks go, of course, to my wife, Louise and to our family, for their forbearance and support. The standard morning conversation in our house often starts with Louise asking me what I am doing today, to which the correct response should be doing some paid work. The actual answer is, well, I’ve got to go down to the town hall for a meeting about...

As I said last year, I am happy to continue as chair for a further year, if you want, but I don't think it right that I repeat that sentence next year. I can't stress how enjoyable the role is. There is almost no responsibility and plenty of opportunity to stick your nose into other people's business, asked or unasked. Please, please, please will someone volunteer for next year.