

Proposed Constitution of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum

Working group proposals

Background

It has become very clear over recent months that there is a lack of clarity over the terms of reference of the Town Forum; a small working group was set up to propose a formal constitution to the February 2011 Forum meeting and to advise on revisions to draft minutes of the October 2010 Forum meeting prior to their formal acceptance as a true and accurate record of that meeting.

Working Group

The membership of the working group is:

Chair: Matt Goodwin – Village Residents Association
Jane Fenwick – Calverley Park Residents Association
John Forster – Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society
Michael Holman – Twinning and Friendship Association
Catherine Mayhew – Tunbridge Wells Borough Councillor
Altan Omer – Benhall Mill Road Land Association

Issues addressed in developing the proposed constitution

The primary issues that the working group has addressed are:

- the purpose of the Forum;
- the responsibilities of the Forum;
- entitlement to membership of the Forum and entitlement of members of the Forum to vote;
- arrangements for meetings and voting;
- responsibilities of the members of the Forum to their own member organisations; and
- The management of the Forum.

The proposed constitution will be circulated in advance of the January 2011 meeting of the Town Forum but will be debated and brought into effect, if approved, at the February 2011 meeting. The final typed version of the constitution will be dated as at day of the meeting on which it was adopted and will be recorded in the minutes.

Proposed 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

Residents of the unparished area of Tunbridge Wells (the Town) wish to play an active role in shaping the future of the Town and to ensure that their views on Town matters are effectively 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 Royal 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 the Town and working with and informing the Local Strategic Partnership;;
- encouraging the establishment of new residents associations in the unparished area;
- encouraging their own 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 representative(s) of TWBC or another body on behalf of the Forum. In such cases the representative(s) will be responsible for ensuring that the Town Forum is kept informed both of progress and of opportunities to attend Council and/or other meetings.

2. Membership of the Town Forum

Core membership of the Forum will comprise:

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

Any voluntary or not for profit organisation that is able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Forum either that the majority of its membership comprises residents of the unparished area or can demonstrate 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.

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 of the aims and objectives of the organisation and also a note on 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.

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.

Observers

On occasions other members of the organisations represented on the Town Forum may wish to attend and they are welcome to do so.. They have no right to speak or vote but may, at the discretion of the Chair, ask a specific question.

3. Voting entitlement

Nominated members

At General or Special Meetings 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 Special Meeting it is an absolute requirement that one or other named representative of the member organisation should have attended at least four meetings in the previous twelve months. The minutes of the Forum's meetings will be taken as conclusive evidence of this attendance.

Councillor members

Councillor members are each entitled to a single vote at both General and Special Meetings but to be eligible to vote at the AGM they must have attended at least four meetings in the previous twelve months. The minutes of the Forum's meetings will be taken as conclusive evidence of this attendance.

4. Role and reporting responsibilities of Town Forum Members

Town Forum members are expected to:

- represent the views of their association, membership organisation or ward 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 reporting responsibilities above 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 members 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.

5. Management of the Town Forum.

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 should be a named representative of a residents' association; and
- two Deputy Chairs, only one of whom may be a Borough Councillor..

For avoidance of doubt, the Chair and both Deputy Chairs will be elected annually and only eligible to serve 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, in an advisory and non-voting capacity, up to three other members of the Town Forum for up to one year who it considers will help to fulfil the aims of, or has 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 remove any member of the Committee for good and proper reason. The reasons for removal should be given to members at the next available meeting.

6. *Duties of the Officers*

The duties of the Chair shall be to:

- chair meetings of the Town Forum and the Management Committee;
- represent the Town Forum at functions/meetings to which the Town Forum has been invited;
- act as the spokesperson of the Town Forum ensuring that the majority view, or range of views are made clear and explicit including in relations with the press and other media; and
- coordinate the output of the Town Forum as necessary.

The duties of the two Deputy Chairs will be to:

- assist the Chair in his/her duties and to stand in for the Chair as necessary;
- facilitate agreement on any follow up required and undertake necessary actions; this might include communications, proposals to other bodies, preparing bids for funding, training requirements, and other practical activities;
- deputise as required by the Chair as spokesperson for the Town Forum.

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

- keep a list of member organisations, their two nominated members 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 any 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 members shall be given at least fourteen days notice of the AGM and shall be entitled to attend and vote in accordance with the section in the Constitution above entitled “**Voting entitlement**”.

The business of the AGM shall include:

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

At least fifteen nominated members who satisfy the voting entitlement requirements must be present for the Annual General Meeting, or any other General or Special 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 but if no such person is available then by majority vote of eligible voting members an election chair will be agreed. 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 will need to be formally proposed and seconded at the AGM by members 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 nine general meetings, excluding 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**”.

Special General Meeting

A Special General Meeting may be called by the Management Committee or by a minimum of ten Forum members to discuss an urgent matter. The Secretary shall give all members fourteen days notice of any Special 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 its facilities available to the Town Forum for meetings. This support will be reviewed annually.

9. Publicity

Dates, agendas and minutes of meetings shall be posted on the Borough Council website, on the board outside the Town Hall, and 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 place that is easily accessible for its members.

11. Changes to the Constitution.

Any changes to this Constitution must be agreed by at least two-thirds of those eligible members present and voting at any General Meeting.

12. Dissolution.

The Forum may be wound up at any time if agreed by two-thirds of those members present and voting at any general meeting.

13. Adoption of the Constitution.

The Constitution will be discussed and agreed at the Forum meeting in February 2011 following which an election for first Chair and Deputy Chairs under this new Constitution will take place in March 2011.