



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting for the RTW Town Forum

on 5 February 2026 at 6.30pm

in the Pump Room at The Potteries

Present: Chairman: Stuart Anderson – Beulah Road Residents’ Association,
Deputy chairs: Adrian Berendt and David Scott – The Potteries Resident’s and Owner’s Group,

Carol & Pat Wilson – Inner London Road Residents’ Association, Caroline Auckland – RTW Civic Society, Don Sloan – Molyneux Park Road Residents’ Association/Rotary Club RTW, Jane Fenwick – Calverley Park Residents Association, Ruth Chambers – The Oddfellows Tunbridge Wells District, Susan A Bishop – Boyne Park Residents Association, Michael Paynter – The Potteries Residents’ and Owner’s Group, Michael Holman – Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association, Dorothea Holman – Boyne Park Residents Association, Tim Tempest – The Avenues Residents’ Association and Friends of the Grove, Siobhan O’Connell – Friends of Dunorlan Park, John Baker, Lynne Monckton – Friends of TW Cemetery, Chris Morris – Friends of Beulah Road, David Wilson – Rotary TW, Neil Williams – Warwick Park Area Residents’ Association, Helen Featherstone – Upper Stone Street Residents’ Association, Katharina Mahler-Bech – RTW in Bloom, Lorna Blackmore – Grantley Court Residents’ Association, Roger Barton – Friends of the Commons, Natasha Borg, Jenina Pendry – Dudley Road Residents Association, Brian Lippard – RTW Civic Society, Philip Wheeler, Cllr Ukonu Obasi – St. John’s Ward, RTW.

1. **Since the last AGM** in November 2024, Stuart Anderson has assumed the chairmanship of the Town Forum (TF) in April 2025.
2. **Apologies for absence:** Joy Podbury – Friends of the Commons, Jill Ruddock – Soroptimist International TW District, Cllr Hugo Pound, Cllr Victoria Taylor Jones, Mandy Flashman Wells – Fairtrade, Anne Musker – Access Group .
3. **Minutes of the last AGM** have been circulated before this meeting, and read and noted.
4. **Matters arising:** It was determined that as no other nominations had been submitted, Stuart Anderson (SA) would continue as Chair, and Adrian Berendt (AB) and David Scott (DS) would continue as vice chairs for another year. The TF focus will continue to be the formation of a Town Council (TC), the next phases of local government reform and raising awareness among the town’s population of all its implications.
5. **Chairman’s report:** SA recapped how withdrawal of TWBC support for the Town Forum had left the town’s residents without a voice at a vital time when large local government reform is being implemented. The energy and goodwill of Forum’s management group members have kept the TF alive and active. Considerable research has been undertaken into the proposals and several successful Town Councils examined. In addition, research has been undertaken into RTW’s ‘Special Expenses’.

+ The TWBC will receive the Community Governance Review (CGR) report and decide on the formation – or not - of a new TC in the unparished area of TW at Full Council on 22 April. The formation of the Unitary Authorities (UA) in Kent is out for further public consultation with 4 possible options. A West Kent UA comprising TW, Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks and (possibly) Maidstone is preferred by the Forum.

+ Public awareness of the scale local government reforms is low. A further effort is needed plus support from people with relevant skills in communications, social media, marketing, lobbying, etc. Natasha Borg described her proposals for raising the Forum’s profile, broadening its support, sharpening its mission statement across a wider range of digital platforms.

+ Actions taken so far to build a sound financial basis for the Forum included the formation of a Community Interest Company (CIC), **RTW Town Forum CIC**, with directors from the Forum – Adrian Berendt, David Scott, Katharina Mahler-Bech, and Alex Green (RTW Together – the BID), Pete Taylor (organizer TW Local and Live), Catherine Rankin (former TWBC Councillor).

+ Changes to membership categories are proposed to include individuals in addition to community and residents groups. A voluntary membership fee of £10 to £20 approx was proposed and accepted. Funds of about £1500/yr are needed to run the Forums meetings (£250), printing and communications (£1000) and for overheads (£250) such as bank charges etc. Gifts, donations, grants from Councillors can all be accepted in the CIC’s CAF bank account. Sevenoaks Town Council generates income for its town from events and the community services it delivers.

6. **Update from Working Groups:** Reports are included in the AGM papers. DS applauded the years of work by Michael Holman in establishing the Water in the Wells and Refresh TW charities, and the installation of water and art features around the town. He has announced his retirement. Michael commented on the importance of continuing the town’s legacy of water, wealth and health by promoting the inclusion of water and artworks in large development schemes such as those proposed at Torrington car park and the Hendy site.

7. **a) Finance and Special Expenses:** A close examination by the TF of ‘Special Expenses’ has discovered an unexplained disparity between the rates collected (£2.8m) and the amount directed to the unparished areas in TW for community facilities and services (£1.6m). TWBC has agreed to appoint independent auditors examining these figures. The TF argues that clarity is needed to ensure that RTW retains the community assets and services its ratepayers have paid for in the past, so that they are retained under local control in the future by the new TC. Local government reform will level up council tax rates across all councils. Rates in TW have been historically lower than elsewhere, and they will inevitably rise to match others in the West Kent UA. Discretionary services such as maintenance of parks and open spaces should be retained within the control of local people. Others local assets in RTW could include management or ownership of the Camden Centre, the RVP, planning, community events, benches, toilets, etc.

The Town Forum wants the new Town Council to put Royal Tunbridge Wells first, manage the parks and green open spaces, ensure financial viability and be comparable in its activities and responsibilities to other major towns in the West Kent Unitary Authority.

b) The Commons: The sale of the Commons by Target Follow presents a once in a generation opportunity to bring these 256 acres into community ownership. AB urged residents and businesses to make pledges to support its purchase by the Friends of the Commons by 26 March 2026. He said it is an 'Asset of Community Value' that is priceless to the community but its sale value is not known. The Woodland Trust, and National Trust have been approached to help the bid; it was agreed to also approach the City of London. Crowd funding may also be an option. It is likely that the car park will not be included in the sale but it might be swapped for 6 acres of land elsewhere – at Still Green. TWBC will not submit a bid. Two further public meetings are planned for 7th February in the Camden Centre and 14th February in Rusthall, St Paul's Church Hall.

c) RTW Parks campaign: SA said the campaign had begun to highlight the need to retain local control over parks and open spaces for the new TC. A meeting of all the Friends Groups of parks has been held by the TF to highlight the issues affecting them. Some 90% of Special Expenses are consumed by the Parks and open spaces maintenance contract. A possible slogan is *Locally Run, Locally Paid For*. The focus should be on the most used and valued assets in RTW which should be managed by the new TC. Posters and a children's painting competition will help raise awareness among families and others of the need to secure other services and assets for the new TC.

8. Discussion:

- i) The TWBC is focusing on the formation of the UAs; the TF on the other hand is working with Friends groups to create asset registers of each park and open space. The TF will also lobby town councillors who will be forming the 'shadow Town Council' and newly elected members (in May) to ensure their support for a new TC which should have the scope of services comparable to others in the UA.
- ii) Currently it is not known what support there is for a new TC among TWBC councillors.
- iii) It was agreed to provide template letters for members to use in lobbying councillors and for the parks campaign. An appeal was made for those with digital marketing skills ranging from creating digital content to making You Tube videos, to form a task group to work for the next few weeks on this project.
- iv) It was argued that discretionary services should be separate from compulsory services because the expenditure on the latter would likely impinge on the former.

9. **Other business:** Helen Featherstone alerted the meeting to proposed changes to the Adult Education offering at the Amelia Scott. Department for Education (DfE) funding is now directed towards skills for employment, English, maths, and digital skills, meaning many arts, crafts, and lifestyle courses will no longer be subsidized. This will impact on the range of courses and implies staff changes.