

## ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Thursday 19 November 2020 held online via Zoom, starting at 6pm.**

**Members:** Stuart Anderson (Beulah Road Residents' Association), Caroline Auckland (Soroptimist International of Tunbridge Wells and District), Tim Ball (Calverley Park Crescent Association), David Barnett (Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert Parks), 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), Stephen Bowser (Residents First), Matthew Brown (Tunbridge Wells Puppetry Festival), Robert Chris (Grove Hill House Residents' Association), Marieke de Jonge (Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth), John de Lucy (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery), Peter de Wit (Nevill Court Roads Committee), Helen Featherstone (Upper Stone Street Residents' Association), Ross Feeney (Royal Tunbridge Wells Together), Jane Fenwick (Calverley Park Residents' Association), Margaret Ginman (Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery), Caroyn Gray (The Forum), Dorothea Holman (Boyne Park Residents' Association), Michael Holman (Tunbridge Wells Twinning and Friendship Association), Delphine Houlton (Hawkenbury Village Association), Brian Lippard (Civic Society of Royal Tunbridge Wells), Marianne MacDonald (co-optee), Katharina Mahler-Bech (Royal Tunbridge Wells in Bloom and Telephone House Neighbours Association), Sue Pound (COCA), Veronica Segall-Jones (Banner Farm Residents' Association and Tunbridge Wells Older Peoples Forum), Don Sloan (Molyneux Park Gardens Residents' Association), Dawn Stanford (Nourish Community Foodbank), Anne Stobo (Friends of Tunbridge Wells Museum, Library and Art Gallery), Angus Stewart (Tunbridge Wells Anti-Aircraft Noise Group), Tim Tempest (Friends of The Grove and The Avenues Residents' Association), Adrian Thorne (Ramslye Residents), Alastair Tod (Poona Road Residents' Association), Neil Williams (Warwick Park Residents' Association) and Carol Wilson (Inner London Road Residents' Association).

**Councillor Members:** Councillors Lidstone (St. John's ward), Pound (Sherwood ward), Rutland (Culverden ward), Scott (Culverden ward) and Woodward (Broadwater ward).

**Others in Attendance:** William Benson (Chief Executive, TWBC), Liz de Villiers (Chief Executive, Citizen's Advice), Lisa Glasscote (Community Ladders), Councillor Mackonochie (Portfolio Holder for Communities and Wellbeing), Paul Mason, Councillor McInroy (KCC Tunbridge Wells West Division), Councillor Podbury (Rusthall ward), Councillor Rankin (KCC Tunbridge Wells South Division), Hilary Smith (Economic Development Manager, TWBC), Chris Stevenson, David Wakefield, Jasmine Whiteside and Mark O'Callaghan (Secretary to the Town Forum).

### APOLOGIES

- 1 Apologies were received from Councillor Morton (St. John's ward).

### 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 2019 AGM

- 3 The Chairman noted that the minutes had been agreed in principal at the meeting in January 2020 but were submitted here for formal approval.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the AGM held on 27 November 2019 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
- Don Sloan – Deputy Chairman

The Secretary set out the procedure for voting electronically as follows: All members listed in the 'Voting Entitlement for Member Organisations and Councillors', as set out at agenda item 2, may vote by raising their hand and a count would be taken. A provisional result would be announced whereupon any member with concerns may challenge the result. In the even of a challenge a roll call vote would be taken.

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

Adrian Berendt, Chairman: 34 YES, 0 NO  
Don Sloan, Deputy Chairman: 34 YES, 0 NO

## **RESOLVED –**

- 1) That Adrian Berendt be elected Chairman for 2020/21 until the date of the AGM 2021; and
- 2) That Don Sloan be elected Deputy Chairman for 2020/21 until the date of the AGM 2021.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 6.20pm.



*The voice of the residents of Royal Tunbridge Wells*

## **Town Forum AGM – Chair’s report 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

This is the time of year when I report back on the achievements of the Town Forum over the past 12 months and try to identify the challenges for the coming year. When I look back at 2020, all I can say, with more than a hint of irony is “well...that went well...”. When we met a year ago, which of us knew that we were three weeks away from a global pandemic being reported to the World Health Organisation?

I wasn’t completely wrong about 2020 though when I said:

*“Whatever happens on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2019, Brexit will not be done on 31<sup>st</sup> January.”*

Well, we’re now six weeks away from the transition period ending and we still don’t know whether Kent is going to be one large lorry park.

More locally, I also said:

*“We need to hold at least one of meetings outside of the Town Hall in 2020.”*

We’ve overachieved massively on that score, with all bar one of our meetings held in my house. I think we were one of the first organisations locally to embrace new technology, something I will come back to later. Despite the lack of physical meetings, we have increased our membership base and we now have 54 member organisations, including 4 new members:

- COCA (Camden Hill, Oakfield Court Road and Cambridge Gardens Residents' Association)
- Nevill Court Roads Committee
- Royal Tunbridge Wells In Bloom (shocked it wasn’t already a member); and
- Ramslye Residents our first RA in Broadwater ward

Welcome to you all, but particularly to Ramslye Residents: we lack Resident Associations in the south of the town. One TF member has helpfully put together a grid showing Town Forum representation ward by ward. About 30% of our member organisations speak for different interest groups across the town. Some 55% come from 3 out of 7 wards. The remaining 4 wards represent just 15% of our membership. In 2 of those wards, councillors attend pretty regularly– thank you - but in the other 2, councillor attendance is poor. I’m won’t name names (yet), but if you are a councillor in a ward with few Residents Associations, please think how your residents can be more effectively represented in Town Forum discussions.

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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); Don Sloan (Deputy Chair); Alastair Tod (Deputy Chair); David Wakefield (Finance); Jane Fenwick (Transport); Marianne McDonald (Wellbeing); Carolyn Grey (Culture, Leisure & Tourism); Mark Booker (Strategic Planning); Michael Holman (Water in the Wells)

COVID-19 has delayed finding a vision for the town. While I'm disappointed that the cross-party group didn't continue to meet earlier in the year, I understand why and it's great that it has now started up again. The COVID-19 group instigated by the Borough Council has been a great success. Meeting (virtually, of course) every couple of weeks, it allows a wide-ranging discussion about response and recovery issues. It includes councillors from all parties and across the borough, representatives from businesses and voluntary organisations plus the Town Forum and is largely free from party politics. Thank you, William, for setting that up and to all of your team for their continued support of the Town Forum in an incredibly difficult and eventful year. I'm particularly grateful for Mark O'Callaghan's help in keeping me on the straight and narrow.

Thanks go, of course, to those that volunteer on the Town Forum working groups, where the real work of the Town Forum happens. We need more people to join in; please do so!

I want, of course, to thank all the management group, who continue to suffer my disorganisation, but I want to single out Carolyn Grey in particular. Not just because she stepped up to lead the culture, leisure and tourism working group, but because she was brave enough to raise her head above the social media parapet and ask for positive suggestions people had about the town centre.

Like many of us, I do use social media. It gives me a good insight into what some people are thinking and saying, but I'm also conscious that it is highly unrepresentative and includes a small but vocal minority. The slew of negative and personal responses to Carolyn's perfectly reasonable suggestions dismayed me. We cannot conduct debate by shouting.

This is where the Town Forum is so valuable and why it remains so relevant as a channel for unbiased information. Thanks to the efforts of Katharina Mahler-Bech, the success of our twitter account, which is a fake-news free zone btw, can be measured by our increased following – up by a further 100 this year to 880 followers. It's a simple twitter handle @townforum – please follow us and tweet your news and views.

As ever, I am indebted to my long-suffering family, Louise, William, Robert, Alice and Suzanna. I had to block an obnoxious troll on social media last week. It wasn't because of something he said, but because he (I assume 'he') has an anonymous account. If you can't own up to your views, then better to stay silent. What were his accusations? 1) I am an ex-banker (wrong, but never mind) 2) I have room on my drive for 3 cars (technically right, although there's never more than our old one) and 3) of being the most selfish person in Tunbridge Wells. I leave that to others to judge. He may well be right. Certainly, I need to spend more time with my family. If you want me to continue next year as chair of the Town Forum, well OK, but it has to be my last year.

So, what of 2021? Given how 2020 turned out, I make no predictions, other than that it will be a very different place and we need to embrace whatever change it brings. Even if the global pandemic dissipates, we will be left two matters which will not. 1) We are in the midst of a technological revolution, which will make the industrial revolution of the 1800s seem like a pinprick in history. 2) Climate change forces us to think differently. If you haven't read the Government's 10 point plan for a Green Industrial Revolution, I urge to find

a comfortable spot and digest the contents of the paper. If you find yourself asking the question, but how will I do [... insert what you were doing in the past?], you might be disappointed. If you want to engage in how things can be better in future, as Carolyn did in her question on NextDoor, then, work with the Town Forum and, together, we can make Tunbridge Wells the lovely forward-looking place that we want it to be.

Adrian Berendt (aged 62  $\frac{3}{4}$ )

19<sup>th</sup> November 2020