

DEVELOPMENT

People's panel to help council find the way to the future for our town centre

By Chris Britcher

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COUNCIL leader Bob Atwood says a new town panel will play a vital role in what has been one of the most controversial areas of local politics in recent years.

Formed by Cllr Atwood as part of his Town Centre Action Plan (TCAAP), the 14-strong panel comprises of a host of people from diverse aspects of the town, from a high-profile blogger to a senior executive of the town's biggest employer, and from a famous architect to a working mother.

The aim is for the panel to help guide the direction of the town centre, and it will tackle the thorny issues of how to keep the town a major attraction while maintaining a balance between commercial and cultural demands.

Cllr Atwood explained: "The panel is a very important way to get a good cross section of the town on how the area should be developed over the next 20 years.

"Some members approached us asking to be included, others we approached. It in no way precludes individuals, groups or other interested parties contributing in other ways and part of the role of the panel would be to consider how they could maximise participation in future consultation exercises.

"Whilst the process by which we put this plan together is heavily regulated by statute and already includes many



CONTRIBUTION: The panel comprises people from all walks of life who have an interest in making the best of Tunbridge Wells

opportunities for the public and interested parties to contribute their views. I am keen to ensure that any town plan should reflect, as far as is possible, the views and aspirations of a convincing and representative cross-section of residents, visitors and businesses.

"I sincerely hope the panel will quickly find its feet and act successfully as an impartial pool of expertise which will help shape the future of Royal Tunbridge Wells for many years to come."

Among the members are Chris Cassidy, writer of the popular Anke

blog, David Clarke, operations director at AXA PPP, architect Ptolemy Dean, Katharine Mahler-Bech, member of the local strategic partnership and Town Forum, Richard Powell, vice principal of the Skinners' Kent Academy and Richard Simm, chairman of the Pantiles Traders.

The panel will meet on a regular basis, with another meeting due to be staged before Christmas.

Cllr Atwood added: "The panel will feed in its views on the emerging TCAAP. It will exist in this mode for

a limited period of time and will have an opportunity to listen to the evidence being gathered and to make suggestions for the council's working party to consider.

"Whilst for legal reasons the views of the panel cannot have any greater weight or status than that of other consultees, it will act as an important reality check to make sure Tunbridge Wells Borough Council does everything it can to ensure the emerging plan meets the hopes and expectations of residents, businesses and visitors."