

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE COMMUNITY FORUM

MINUTES

Monday, 24th November, 2025

Present: Cllr L Athwal (Chair), Cllr D W King (Vice-Chair), Friends of Mill Stream (Vice-Chair), Cllr G C Bridge, Cllr J Clokey, Cllr A Cope, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr A Mehmet, Cllr R W G Oliver, Cllr B A Parry, Cllr S Pilgrim, Cllr K S Tunstall, County Cllr P Stepto and County Cllr M Hood

Together with representatives from:

Angel Indoor Bowls Club
Feast
Imago Community
Rotary Club of Tonbridge
Scotts Project Trust
TBUG
Tonbridge Civic Society
Tonbridge District Scout Council
Tonbridge Historical Society
Tonbridge Lions Club
Tonbridge Sports Association
Tonbridge U3A

An apology for absence was received from Councillor M R Rhodes.

TCF 25/39 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members nominated for this meeting.

TCF 25/40 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TCF 25/41 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

**(1) Minute Number TCF 25/35 (meeting held on 1 September 2025)
- Community Governance Review**

During the summer, an initial consultation was held to determine whether residents were in favour of establishing a Town Council in Tonbridge. The findings of this consultation were presented to Full Council on 28 October 2025. The report not only shared the consultation outcomes, but also sought approval to proceed with a

further, more detailed consultation focused on the potential structure of a future Town Council.

The recommendations contained within the report were unanimously supported by Full Council. Following this endorsement, a second round of consultation commenced on 31 October 2025. As part of this consultation, the Borough Council website was updated including the survey questions. In addition, regular posts had been made on social media and direct emails sent to residents on 5 November 2025, encouraging participation and to express their views.

The consultation period was scheduled to run until 12 December 2025. To date, 805 responses had been received, which exceeded expectations, given the technical and detailed nature of the survey questions.

Upon conclusion of the consultation, all responses would be analysed and used to formulate recommendations. These recommendations would be discussed with the cross-member working group in early January 2026. Subsequently, a final report would be produced and presented to Full Council on 24 February 2026, at which point a decision would be made regarding the establishment of Tonbridge Town Council.

**(2) Minute Number TCF 25/34 (meeting held on 1 September 2025)
Tonbridge Town Centre**

Tom Freke reported that the Civic Society had responded to, and engaged with plans concerning the area east of the High Street in Tonbridge. The Civic Society believed that any development plan must be carefully managed to address the town's parking usage and requirements. Councillor Adem Mehmet, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Tonbridge Regeneration addressed the parking issues, highlighting that the car parks were usually empty except occasionally in peak periods, and a balanced approach was required. Feedback from the consultation revealed a clear preference for retaining the car park located between the High Street and Sainsbury's and Cabinet had taken this feedback into account and was actively exploring the possibility of increasing parking capacity in this area. In terms of phasing, the new Angel Centre was identified as a key priority, and attention was also turning towards the riverside area. The parking element, including the prospect of increasing provision, would continue to be reviewed as the project moved into the planning application stage.

TCF 25/42 PRESENTATION FROM HIKENT

Following an invitation from the Forum, Brian Piner provided a brief overview of 'Hi Kent', a registered charity for deaf and hard of hearing

people in Kent. Established in 1986, the charity provided practical support and services to help people manage hearing loss and raise awareness of their needs. The charity offered a wide range of services, including Hearing Aid Aftercare Clinics, education and training, assistive equipment, support services, assessments, information and advice.

Brian Piner took the opportunity to raise concern regarding parking charges for volunteers and in response, organisations impacted were asked to contact the Chair or Cabinet Member for Finance, Waste and Technical Services. County Councillor Mark Hood further enquired about the possibility of reviewing the existing parking charges and it was clarified that the Administration currently had no plans to introduce changes to the parking charges.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor Anna Cope, and it was unanimously agreed that 'Hi Kent' be appointed as a member of the Tonbridge Community Forum.

RESOLVED: That 'Hi Kent' be appointed as a member of the Tonbridge Community Forum.

MATTERS RAISED IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING

TCF 25/43 KENT POLICE UPDATE

Due to unforeseen circumstances, a representative from Kent Police was unable to attend and an update would be circulated outside of the meeting.

TCF 25/44 LOCAL PLAN

The consultation for the Local Plan was currently underway. This stage, known as Regulation 18, represented a key phase and was the last major opportunity for public consultation. It was strongly encouraged that all interested parties submit their views at this time. Details of the Regulation 19 consultation were highlighted and further information would be shared in due course.

A series of public engagement events were being organised to facilitate input from the community. These included:

- 25 November 2025 - Drop-in session to be held at the Council Offices, Gibson Building, West Malling, 4.00pm to 7.00pm
- 27 November 2025 – In person meeting held at the Angel Centre at 7.30pm
- 4 December 2025 – Drop-in session to be held at Tonbridge Castle, 4.00pm – 7.00pm
- 15 December 2025 – Online webinar at 7.00pm (to register click [here](#)).

Comments on the Local Plan could be submitted online utilising the Commonplace software platform at <https://tmbcconsult.commonplace.is>.

TCF 25/45 TONBRIDGE INFRASTRUCTURE STATEMENT

The Forum received a presentation from Eleanor Hoyle, Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health, on the Tonbridge Infrastructure Statement, which served as a formal mechanism to collect information on proposed local projects that might require funding or partnership support. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council introduced Parish Infrastructure Statements to enable Parishes to identify and bring forward projects within their communities. These projects could then be considered during section 106 discussions related to development sites, ensuring local needs were recognised in planning decisions.

Parishes were responsible for leading on their statements, identifying projects that might seek funding through section 106 or that might require collaborative working for delivery. It was important to note that these statements did not cover strategic infrastructure, which was instead addressed by the Borough Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan or by the relevant statutory authorities' delivery plans.

As Tonbridge itself was not parished, the Borough Council acted as the most local level of government for the area, meaning the Borough Council must take ownership of the Tonbridge Infrastructure Statement. The Tonbridge Community Forum remained a key consultative body in this process.

In terms of progress to date and next steps, the Borough Council's Head of Planning previously attended a Tonbridge Community Forum meeting to discuss section 106 and infrastructure statements. Since then, the Forum had gathered community feedback on possible projects; this list was not exhaustive. Projects already included in the Borough Council's Capital Plan had also been considered.

Projects had been categorised and discussed to clarify responsibilities, outline next steps, and suggest potential funding sources. Following the discussions at the Forum, a draft Tonbridge Infrastructure Plan would be presented to the Borough Council's Cabinet for approval in January or February 2026. Projects lacking cost estimates might see actions included to address this gap.

All of this was set against the backdrop of ongoing local government changes, including the Community Governance Review in Tonbridge and wider Local Government Reorganisation in Kent. An annual review of the Tonbridge Infrastructure Statement, as was common in Parishes, would be proposed as part of its adoption.

In response to a question regarding how schools obtain funding, with particular reference to the ongoing need for additional school places, it

was noted that Kent County Council included academies in their growth projections, taking into account both population forecasts and the demand for pupil places. When considering broader community facilities, such as the provision of additional sports amenities that would benefit the wider community, it was highlighted that schools could bring potential projects to the attention of both the planning authority and Kent County Council. Such proposals could then be considered for future development opportunities. Collaboration with organisations such as Sport England would also be sought where appropriate.

County Councillor Mark Hood advised that consideration had previously been given to School Streets initiative, however it was emphasised that the success of such schemes was dependent on the active buy-in and support from the school itself.

The Chair suggested that a sub-group be formed to identify and explore potential projects in the new year.

TCF 25/46 PROGRESS REPORT ON THE REINSTATEMENT OF THE PENNY SHELTER, RIVER WALK

The Penny Shelter had recently sustained damage after a waste collection vehicle reversed into it. The responsible party had accepted liability, and the issue was now being handled through the insurance process. Following the completion of the insurance claim, the Borough Council would consider whether to replace the shelter on a like-for-like basis or to explore alternative design options. Community input on this matter was welcomed, during which it was suggested that a permanent stage in the area would be a positive addition. The Historical Society emphasised the importance of reinstating the shelter due to its historical significance and proposed the installation of a plaque to explain the history of River Walk.

It was suggested that a resident survey could help determine the preferred outcome for the shelter and the wider River Walk area, noting there was potential to accommodate both a shelter and a stage. However, it was pointed out that, with several consultations already ongoing, it may not be practical to conduct another survey at this time. The parameters of what could be achieved remained unclear until the insurance process was finalised.

Questions regarding possible restrictions on developments in the area were raised, as well as a desire to see improved amenities along the river walk and restrictions on vehicle movements. Any groups or individuals with views or suggestions on these matters were encouraged to contact Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

TCF 25/47 SPEED LIMIT ON LOWER HAYSDEN LANE

Concern was raised regarding the current speed limit of 40 mph between Brook Street and Haysden Country Park. This section of road was hazardous due to its narrowness, raising significant safety concerns particularly for cyclists and pedestrians. The question of whether it was possible to lower the speed limit in this area had been raised.

County Councillor Mark Hood explained that requests had been made to Kent County Council over a number of years to reduce the speed limit. However, Kent Police had stated that they would not allow a reduction in speed limit unless the road was illuminated, which would require the installation of street lights. Unfortunately, there was currently no funding available to install the necessary lighting along the lane, therefore achieving a reduction in the speed limit was not currently possible.

Efforts had been made in collaboration with Kent County Council Right of Ways officers and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's Leisure Services. These parties had met and reached an agreement whereby the bridleway would access the end of the driveway to Haysden Country Park. Rights of Way were currently in the process of drafting a proposal for this scheme.

Should there be any developments or progress regarding this issue, County Councillor Hood would provide an update to the Forum.

TCF 25/48 PROMOTION OF UPCOMING EVENTS

(1) Tonbridge Rotary Christmas Festival

Tonbridge's popular festive tradition would return with a spectacular community celebration on 30 November 2025. The High Street would be closed to traffic and transformed into a bustling Christmas market. There would also be a family fun fair in Sovereign Way Mid car park and a firework finale at 5.30pm at the Big Bridge, near River Walk.

(1) Tonbridge Christmas Fest – Bailey Lawn only

Tonbridge Castle would come alive with festive magic at the Tonbridge Christmas Fest which would be held between 12 – 23 December 2025.

(2) Historical Society

The Tonbridge Historical Society would be hosting The History of Pantomime on 11 December 2025 and Commonwealth War Graves on 12 February 2026. Both events would be held at the Angel Centre and commence at 7.45pm.

(3) Lions Club

Since 1950, the Lions Club had been supporting local charities, good causes and disadvantaged individuals. The club would be collecting donations throughout December on Fridays and Saturdays in Waitrose car park and Sainsbury's east side, in Tonbridge.

(4) Tonbridge School Market

Tonbridge School Christmas Market would be held on 30 November 2025, 10.00am – 4.00pm.

(5) Round Table Santa Sleigh

From 12 December to 20 December 2025, the Round Table would be collecting food donations on behalf of FEAST and Sustain Community Food Banks who support people in need by running community larders in Tonbridge for families and individuals on a low income.

TCF 25/49 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Update on the Banking Hub

Sally Pearce delivered an update regarding the status of the banking hub in Tonbridge. It was confirmed that a suitable site had been identified on the High Street and negotiations were taking place.

The meeting ended at 8.58 pm