

TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

TONBRIDGE COMMUNITY FORUM

MINUTES

Monday, 23rd February, 2026

Present: Cllr L Athwal (Chair), Cllr D W King (Vice-Chair), Friends of Mill Stream (Vice-Chair), Cllr K Barton, Cllr A Cope, Cllr F A Hoskins, Cllr A Mehmet, 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
Hi Kent
Rotary Club of Tonbridge
TBUG
Tonbridge Historical Society
Tonbridge Line Commuters
Tonbridge Lions Club
Tonbridge Sports Association

Councillor M D Boughton was also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G C Bridge, J Clokey, R W G Oliver and M R Rhodes. Apologies for absence were also received from Scotts Project Trust and Imago Community.

TCF 26/1 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members.

TCF 26/2 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

TCF 26/3 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

(1) Minute Number TCF 25/24 – Any other business - Devolution (meeting held on 19 May 2025)

Members received an update on the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The final proposals for LGR had been sent to Government towards the end of November 2025. At present,

consultations were underway, and stakeholders were encouraged to participate and submit their responses.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council along with five other councils, had expressed a preference for Option 3a. This option would see the establishment of three new unitary authorities. A decision from central government regarding the proposals was expected in July 2026. Following this, work would commence in the Autumn to develop and enact the necessary legislation.

(2) Minute Number TCF 25/41 – Update on any action identified in the last minutes - Community Governance Review (meeting held on 24 November 2025)

County Councillor Mark Hood provided an update on the Community Governance Review. A report setting out the results of the Community Governance Review process which started in February 2025 would be considered by Full Council on 24 February 2026. The report, based on the findings of two consultations, recommended that a Town Council for Tonbridge be created.

It was noted that 3,236 people had responded to the first round of the consultation which was focused on the level of support for whether Tonbridge should have a Town Council, this represented a 12% response rate. In response to the question, “Should Tonbridge have a Town Council?”, 72% were in favour. In respect of the second consultation, 897 responses were received.

In regard to the number of councillors on the Town Council, this had been discussed in detail by the Community Governance Review Member Working Group, who recommended that 18 councillors should serve on the Town Council.

In terms of next steps, there would be the creation of the Reorganisation Order, which would officially establish the Town Council and set the boundaries, councillor numbers and election cycles. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England would be made aware of the outcome. Full Council would need to agree a precept and budget in February 2027 ahead of the elections, so that the new Town Council could operate once the elections had taken place.

(3) Minute Number TCF 25/43 Kent Police Update (meeting held on 24 November 2025)

The Chair provided a verbal update on behalf of Kent Police. It was reported that there had been ongoing efforts to combat retail crime during December, with shoplifting being targeted during the busy trading period. Co-ordinator patrols led to multiple arrests, recovery of stolen goods and effective use of the shop-safe radio

system for sharing intelligence. A prolific offender was arrested after a high-value incident and charged. Stop-and-search activities resulted in further arrests, recovery of stolen items, and seizure of a bladed article.

A known prolific shoplifter was managed as a priority nominal, arrested, charged and issued a Community Protection Warning, leading to improved behaviour. Police continued to focus on tackling organised retail criminality, particularly in Tonbridge and Malling, with joint patrols alongside Trading Standards resulting in arrests for retail, fraud, and immigration offences, plus seizure of illegal tobacco. The case had been progressed to the Crown Prosecution Service, with neighbourhood teams maintaining investigative work and partnership enforcement in the town centre.

Efforts to address anti-social behaviour included collaboration with partners and exploring court orders for individuals causing harm. Work with Sainsbury's and the Council had targeted car meets and dangerous driving, aimed to prevent recurrence. High-visibility policing had positively impacted the town centre, deterring anti-social behaviour and contributing to arrests. Ongoing work continued to address graffiti issues with local beat officers.

(4) Minute Number TCF 25/45 Tonbridge Infrastructure Statement (meeting held on 24 November 2025)

The Chair invited members of the Forum to attend a sub-group meeting scheduled to be held at the Tonbridge Methodist Church on 9 March 2026 at 7.00pm. The first hour of the meeting would be dedicated to considering ideas and discussing potential initiatives that could benefit and enhance the town, followed by discussion on three proposals to potentially pursue further.

(5) Minute Number TCF 25/46 – Progress on the Reinstatement of the Penny Shelter, River Walk (meeting held on 24 November 2025)

An update was sought on the progress on the reinstatement of the Penny Shelter and noted that the issue continued to be handled through the insurance process.

TCF 26/4 PRESENTATION FROM REPAIR CAFE

Following an invitation from the Forum, Norman Taylor provided a brief overview of 'Repair Café' a community initiative where volunteers gathered on a monthly basis. The primary aim was to invite members of the public to bring along broken household items in the hope of repairing them, thereby reducing landfill waste and saving money on replacements. The next Tonbridge Repair Café was scheduled to be

held on 14 March 2026, 10.00am – 12.30pm at St. Stephen's Church in Tonbridge.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor King, and it was unanimously agreed that Repair Café be appointed as a member of the Tonbridge Community Forum.

RESOLVED: That Repair Café be appointed as a member of Tonbridge Community Forum.

TCF 26/5 TONBRIDGE SCHOOL

Following an invite from the Forum, Katherine Portman Smith, Theatre Manager and Director of Community Engagement at Tonbridge School provided a brief overview of the work that the School did in the community. Tonbridge School worked in collaboration with others to create meaningful and valued connections and aimed to create partnerships that benefitted and enhanced the education of all students. The School used its partnerships as tools for tackling disadvantage and promoting social justice, diversity and inclusion and worked closely with many local schools and community groups.

The Chair proposed, seconded by Councillor King, and it was unanimously agreed that Tonbridge School be appointed as a member of the Tonbridge Community Forum.

RESOLVED: That Tonbridge School be appointed as a member of Tonbridge Community Forum.

TCF 26/6 TONBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT

Councillor Adem Mehmet provided an update regarding the development of Tonbridge town centre, specifically focused on public engagement around the Angel Centre. The engagement process closed on 22 February 2026, with feedback indicating a strong desire from the community to see an increase in available community facilities. Councillor Mehmet explained that the overarching goal for the redevelopment was to ensure that the needs of as wide a range of local residents as possible were met.

In terms of next steps, a planning application for the redevelopment would be submitted in the near future. The Council would then evaluate the proposal, making their decision based on the planning merits of the project. It was anticipated that a Full Council decision would be made in October 2026. If approved, construction was planned to commence in November 2027, with an estimated completion time of approximately 18 months.

Regarding the management of the Angel Centre, a question was raised about how major user groups would be engaged to discuss their specific

requirements. It was noted that a thorough review would be conducted to determine what could be accommodated within the new facilities.

TCF 26/7 UPDATE ON 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 and that negotiations continued to be held. Access to Cash UK had arranged an information visit at Tonbridge Christ Church URC on 13 March 2026, 10.00am – 12.00pm.

TCF 26/8 LOCAL PLAN

The Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan consultation had concluded and it was reported that over 2,000 responses and 6,000 comments had been received and these were in the process of being analysed by the Council, with the next milestone being the Regulation 19 Draft Local Plan, due for submission to the Planning Inspectorate by the end of 2026.

In response to a query about the continuity of the Local Plan with Local Government Reorganisation on the horizon and the transition of a new Unitary Council, the Leader (Councillor M Boughton) emphasised the importance of progressing and adopting a Local Plan at pace given potential policy implications for the new unitary authority.

TCF 26/9 PROMOTION OF UPCOMING EVENTS

(1) Artefact Event

Tonbridge Historical Society would be holding a series of events between 21 – 25 May 2026. On 23 May, guided walks would take place around the town, focused especially on the town centre. These walks would include talks that would explore the history and heritage of the area, providing residents with deeper insights into local landmarks. Residents would have the first of regular opportunities to view historical artefacts at Tonbridge Castle on 24 May 2026, allowing greater public access to items of local significance.

(2) Tonbridge High Street Talk

A talk had been arranged by Tonbridge Civic Society on 3 March 2026 to reflect on the current state and future of Tonbridge High Street. The event would start with a short talk from local estate agent and podcaster Jack Nutley, who would be sharing his feelings about the High Street and its importance in attracting people to the town.

(3) Tunbridge Wells Climate and Nature Fair

The Tunbridge Wells Climate and Nature Fair would be held at Calverley Grounds, Tunbridge Wells on 3 May 2026, 10.00am - 5.00pm.

(4) Tonbridge Historical Society Events

The Tonbridge Historical Society would be hosting various events at the Angel Centre, including a talk on the Neanderthal Archaeology of the English Channel Region by Dr Pope on 12 March 2026 at 7.45pm. The Annual General Meeting would be held on 9 April 2026 at 7.30pm, followed by a lecture on Murder, Madness and Mayhem? The Belgian Royal Family by Melanie Gibson-Barton. A full programme of lectures for 2026-27 would be available to view on the Historical Society's website in due course.

(5) St George's Parade

The annual St George's Parade on 19 April 2026, 11.00am – 12.00pm, featuring local Scouts, Guides, and bands marching from Tonbridge Castle grounds through the town to the Castle Lawn for ceremonies and promise renewals. The event would be marshalled by the Tonbridge Lions Club.

(6) Tonbridge Triathlon

The Tonbridge Triathlon would be held on 4 May 2026 at Tonbridge School.

(7) Prostate Specific Antigen Testing

Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) testing would be available at the Angel Centre on 16 May 2026, 10.00am – 3.00pm.

(8) It's a Knockout

The Tonbridge Lions Club 'It's a Knockout' event would be held on 19 June 2026 at the Angel Centre, Tonbridge. The event would enable mentally and physically disabled adults to enjoy a fun games day.

TCF 26/10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(1) Appointment of Vice Chair

The annual appointment of Vice Chair was scheduled to take place in May 2026. Representatives from community groups were encouraged to consider their interest in this position ahead of the next meeting.

(2) The Fosse

Concern was raised regarding the coppicing works on The Fosse, which had been undertaken by Churchill Retirement Living who were building a retirement complex nearby. County Councillor Mark Hood would address his concerns with Planning Services at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

(3) Battery Service

Hi Kent advised residents not to purchase the red packaged hearing aid batteries available online, as these had been reported to be hazardous, with incidents of them exploding in the users' ears. Hi Kent were asked to send the information to the Media Team at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council so it could be shared on media platforms to raise awareness and ensure public safety.

The meeting ended at 8.47 pm