

The Council's Priorities

Councillor Tom Dawlings was elected Council Leader in May. Tom is the ward member for Benenden and Cranbrook and has been a councillor since 2014. We asked him to tell Local, and you, about the things that he'll be focusing on as Leader:



Tom Dawlings

Council Leader | Ward member for Benenden and Cranbrook

Rural and town

I've reorganised the Cabinet so that we have one member with responsibility for the concerns of the borough's rural areas, Cllr Fairweather, and one for Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre, Cllr Scott. They are two very different areas and by having a dedicated Cabinet member we can respond to their different needs.



Environment

Environmental concerns have to be at the heart of everything the Council delivers. We have assessed our carbon emissions, and are actively making our properties more efficient to reduce emissions. We must make sure our planning and building policies ensure that developments in the borough are environmentally efficient and, when we look after our parks, we maintain these in the most environmentally effective way we can. And, I want us to have a clean, litter-free borough.



Local Plan

I understand the opposition from people living near areas where the Local Plan identifies areas for significant development. However what the Plan proposes means we do not overload the infrastructure throughout the borough - we're not cramming houses in villages and overloading primary schools and doctors' surgeries. I think the thrust of the Local Plan is absolutely right, it should bring planned development (not developer-led development) and at its core is the protection of the countryside away from the development areas.



Town centre plan

A plan for Royal Tunbridge Wells town centre is important now more than ever as we begin to see rationalisation in the property market. With many staff having worked successfully from home, businesses in Royal Tunbridge Wells are reviewing their property needs. There may also be companies ready to move out of expensive London properties who may want to come to Tunbridge Wells which presents opportunities for the town. The Town Hall is in that mix too, it's too big for the Council's needs so we need to see what use the surplus space can be put to. Bringing more people regularly into the town centre should also be good for the local economy.



Cinema site

You can't look at the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells and ignore the cinema site. I want to see if there is anything we can do to break the cycle of it being bought and sold on without any progress on developing the site.



Delivering services

I want the Council to look at how we deliver services and see if there's a different way of doing it. I am not convinced that outsourcing Council services to large national or international companies gives us the level of service you want. I would prefer to see competitive, responsive, more local suppliers delivering our services or even consider doing things inhouse.



Spending wisely

Overriding everything of course is finance. The restrictions and lockdowns of the past year severely reduced the level of income the Council received, which in turn it uses to fund local services. Nevertheless with government financial support the Council managed to end the year within budget. The impact of the pandemic will continue to be felt and careful financial management will be more important than ever.

