

Torbay Together – Jake Berry visit – Update by Councillor Thomas (D)

I have been requested to provide Council with an update on the recent visit to see Jake Berry (The governments' minister for growth) of Torbay's Strategic Partnership, known locally as Torbay Together.

For the benefit of members of the public gathered here this evening. The Conservative group brought a motion to Council approx. 2 years ago to set up a strategic partnership for the Bay. Basically a group of individuals from all walks of life who wanted to see the Bay move forward over the next 20 years. This group includes representatives from the NHS, Police, Fire, the Voluntary Sector, Business representatives, the Community Development Trust, the business forum and of course a representative from the Council, ie myself. It was and still is important that this body of people is not the Council, it is a partnership and the Council are just one of the players sat around the table.

It has taken approx. 18 months for the group to pull together it's vision for the Bay, it is no surprise this vision hangs and links into the economical strategies that exist for Torbay and the wider region including direct links into the Heart of the South West Local enterprise Partnership. The group has no power to create new policies or new directions of travel, but it does have the power of 'togetherness' something that this Bay has often been lacking over recent years.

With any new partnership or group, trust has had to be earned, gained and respected. However I do believe that Torbay Together is now on the very first rung of helping to drive the Bay forward with some of its ambitions.

To that end and working with our MP, Kevin Foster, he was able to pull together a meeting with the minister for growth, Jake Berry in London last week. We had 45 minutes to present our offer – this was not a begging bowl, this was a genuine 'deal' where with the government's investment we could genuinely progress some of the key ideas in the document to help deliver growth, prosperity for all, and a huge lift in the GVA of the Bay. Positive opportunities for all individuals in the Bay and a better place to live, work and play.

I don't have time this evening to go through the full plan, but to give you just one of the headlines. This includes an ambition for South Devon College to obtain University Status by 2025.

Anyway back to the visit – if you wish to have a blow by blow account of our day trip to London, I need to point you in the direction of the Herald Express, both Jim Parkers column (oh, By the Way – he is the chairman of Torbay Together) and page 35 give you a blow by blow account including the full story of Matilda the Torbay/Russian Doll, the meeting with no trouser belts and our 20 minute audience with the minister.

Mr Chairman, I am extremely conscious of the time – I simply wish to conclude by informing you that the meeting went exceedingly well, the minister was impressed with our presentation. I think he liked the Torbay Doll – at least he was prepared to have his photo taken holding her and he didn't call for security.

However, the most important part of the meeting and the serious part of our visit was to ask the minister to come to the Bay, to experience some of the issues first hand, See some of our proposals and learn how as a committed partnership we wanted to move the Bay forward. This approach has worked very well in Luton under the Luton One initiative and we wanted to replicate the same opportunities here in the Bay.

I am therefore delighted to inform Council this evening that the Minister is extremely interested, he does want to come down and see what we can do, he draws comparisons with Grimsby and their Town Deal, I believe there is an opportunity for a Torbay Town Deal – let's see what happens next. I will of course keep Council informed as we more along this very exciting journey.