

## **Torquay Town Deal and Paignton Future High Street Briefing for Overview & Scrutiny Board**

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### **Subject: Update on Torquay Town Deal & Paignton Future High Street Fund Programmes**

#### **Introduction**

As previously reported to Overview & Scrutiny the award of funding for Torquay through the Town Deal and Paignton through Future High Streets Fund means that the Council is working closely with a range of partners to take forward the development and subsequent delivery of these transformational investment programmes and the individual projects contained within.

There are 15 capital projects across the two town centre programmes with an estimated overall development value expected to be in excess of £180M.

This report provides a response to the previous issues raised by Overview & Scrutiny and a brief summary of progress made in recent months.

#### **Progress made on implementing recommendations**

Recommendation 1 in respect of local labour and skills;

Colleagues at TDA were able to recruit to the role of Building Torbay Skills Coordinator in September. This project is fundamental to the delivery of increased and improved skill levels and opportunities in the local construction sector. The Building Torbay project aims to increase the availability of construction skills and labour to meet increasing demands from the sector and is set out in the Economic Repositioning Plan and supported by the Town Deal to generate additional outcomes for Torquay. Building Torbay aims to:

- Establish a pipeline of Torbay-resident skilled labour to help deliver the multiple regeneration projects across the Bay.
- Increase the number of training places available to meet the needs of the industry and potential learners.
- Establish frameworks through Torbay Council's Planning and Procurement teams' criteria to deliver employment and skills plans within their wider community wealth-building activities.
- Engage the construction industry to exceed community wealth-building obligations and become Building Torbay ambassadors providing strategic and financial support.

The action plan for the project is drafted and a further verbal update will be provided to the Board at the meeting in respect of that.

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Recommendation 2 to use the Town Deal funding to tackle deep and underlying deprivation issues; the board is reminded that the funding is already allocated to projects that were developed through the Town Board and agreed prior to submission of the Town Investment Plan and as such the Town Deal in itself will be one of the tools that the Council and its partners will be using to improve the economic performance and wider opportunities for residents. Within the Town Deal in addition to support for improving skills in construction some revenue funding is allocated to similar skills development projects in respect of hi tech sector technical skills, hospitality and health and social care. There is also support to extend the Ready for Work programme for Torquay residents, this might be either providing the same level of support to more people or deepening the level of support available to the same target numbers.

In addition to this since the April meeting the Department for Work & Pensions “Kickstart” project has been extended by a further three months, enabling employers to start placements up until March 2022. TDA has gained approval of 75 employers through the DWP and 71 young people have entered employment at mid November. Several of the placements TDA is supporting are now nearing an end, as a gateway provider TDA is working with employers to identify progression routes for the young people.

TDA has been asked to begin preparations for a refreshed economic plan 18 months on from the agreement of the repositioning plan, this will support bidding ideas for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which is anticipated to be launched over the winter and perhaps prior to Christmas. It is likely on the basis of the early evidence that skills and employment will be the central theme of a refreshed plan.

Additional capacity has also been recruited into the TDA team helping address the risk shared with Overview and Scrutiny earlier in the year however this continues to be under review so that the programmes can be driven forward at greater pace.

## Town Deal

As previously reported Torquay will receive investment of £21.9 million from the Government’s Towns Fund.

A Town Board was created to oversee the production of the Investment Plan. The Investment Plan was submitted to Government in July 2020 and is the basis for a Town Deal which will support projects that will allow for transformational investment to be delivered in Torquay.

The Investment Plan has evolved from the vision for Torquay, shared by the Town Board and representatives across Torbay’s community, including the Neighbourhood Plan Forum, the Community Development Trust, and Torbay Town Partnership.

The Town Investment Plan focuses on these key areas:

- Delivering a more vibrant town centre through the redevelopment of key town centre sites for mixed uses and public realm schemes
- Improving connectivity to and in Torquay through the delivery of a new rail station at Edginswell and improving connections between the main station and town centre These areas have been chosen for their impact in the short and medium term and ability to be brought forward at pace.
- The Plan also identifies complementary proposals for investment in tourism and cultural projects to improve the quality of Torquay’s offer; investment in delivering employment sites; and improvements to connectivity.

## *Accelerated projects*

Overview & Scrutiny Board will recall that an additional £750,000 was awarded for Torquay there are three accelerated projects;

- Lightplay – a lighting project inspired by the Wavelength project delivered by Torbay Culture in 2019 and intended to improve the lighting and planting at rock walk to enhance the experience of the space.
- Princess Gardens – This project has delivered change in line with an existing appraisal of the Grade II Listed Park and Garden. There have been enhancements to the Banjo, improved planting, improving the infrastructure to host events and generally to enhance site.
- Upton Park – This project has focused on delivering investment in line with the Upton Park masterplan with a focus on improving the zoning within the park and an upgrade on the sports facilities located there, signage, lighting, pathway improvements and landscaping has also been carried out to make the space more accessible, welcoming and useable.

These projects are now complete.

## *Town Investment Plan projects*

Funding business cases have now been submitted in respect of all of the town deal projects with Cabinet at its meeting of 16<sup>th</sup> November agreed to the submission.

Progress of the individual projects varies with the three projects, Harbour Public Realm, Edginswell Rail Station and Stronger Futures (the revenue activity including the skills projects cited above) closest to delivery.

The Harbour Public Realm scheme has been predicated on community views garnered through work over several years and creative engagement in 2018 which was complemented by the neighbourhood plan processes and which told us the space needs to be improved;

- Minimise traffic impact, whilst improving connectivity and wayfinding
- Create space for people and animate the space
- Better use of the space, connecting with its natural and historic environment
- Integrate design and material to respond to the heritage context

The development of this project though has emphasised the need to keep telling the story and provide the community with more and better opportunities to understand the projects and feed views in and this will improve through the programme with lessons learnt helping shape for instance how the Debenhams building plans will be shared.

In common with other projects currently being developed there are early indications of supply chain pressures which are expected to bring cost and time pressures to bear on the Town Deal projects. These have been flagged to Town Board and to Town Deal & Future High Street Fund Steering Group as issues to be aware of. Realistically the only likely mitigations will be around

either reducing the scope and therefore the cost of projects and potentially some of the benefits or allocation of additional funds. It is not possible to predict which is the appropriate route for any of these projects at this time.

## Future High Streets Fund

In July 2020 Torbay Council submitted, on behalf of the community, its bid to the Future High Street Fund (FHSF) programme. The bid value was £19.2 million for the transformation of Paignton town centre through seven projects.

The 'Preferred Option' of projects covered 3 infrastructure projects (Paignton Flood Defence scheme, Paignton Station Square and Torbay Road), an enhanced culture offer by bringing Paignton Picture House into use, comprehensive re-development of Crossways and Victoria Centre together with two major properties on Paignton Station Square.

On 26<sup>th</sup> December 2020 Government announced the list of successful places and allocated £13,363,248 for Paignton's regeneration.

While Future High Streets Funds areas are not required to have a comparable group to the Town Board the Council has established more frequent meetings with a representative group including members along with community partnership, neighbourhood forum and business representatives. This group has helped in particular highlight issues in respect of the Flood Defence and Torbay Road/Station Square projects. The flood defence scheme has recently concluded modelling work on a hybrid option the outcome of that work and design options will be explored early in 2022 with the expectation of being able to fix the design around summer before work beginning in early 2023.

In April it was hoped that work on Station Square would have been able to begin over this winter however representations in respect of potential changes and the design have seen that prospect removed. Following the views from this group there is further design development ongoing which will lead to consultation and a wider programme of engagement anticipated early January 2022. It is expected that this project will be on site over the 2022/23 winter. Work is ongoing with Network Rail in respect of the rail station and the Station Square project will be dealt with as a single project with Torbay Road for contractor procurement.

At Paignton Picture House imminent appointment of an experienced design team will further strengthen the existing team to advance this project ensuring design work develops further supporting programming and feasibility work. Remedial work and works and façade improvements are nearing completion and the FHSF element of the project is now underway.

With regard to Crossways the Overview and Scrutiny Board will be aware and will welcome the Councils successful acquisition of Crossways. On completion, this will allow for significant draw-down of the Future High Streets fund, and allow technical design, tendering and delivery to further progress and work expected to begin on site in the autumn of 2022.