

Meeting: Overview & Scrutiny Board

Date: 11th February 2026

Wards affected: Tormohun

Report Title: Torre Abbey Business Plan

When does the decision need to be implemented? N/A

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Cllr Jackie Thomas, Cabinet Member for Tourism, Culture & Events and Corporate Services

Director Contact Details: Alan Denby, Director of Pride in Place alan.denby@torbay.gov.uk

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To provide Overview and Scrutiny with an update on the performance of Torre Abbey's performance against its business plan and how it is supported the Council's corporate objectives.

2. Reason for the Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1 There is no Proposal within this report, the activities set out in the Torre Abbey business plan support delivery of a healthy, happy and prosperous Torbay with the Abbey as one of the most visible and tangible embodiments of the Council's culture and heritage aspirations. The Abbey supports the creation of places people are proud of and reinforces Torquay and Torbay 's cultural distinctiveness.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1 Overview & Scrutiny to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Tourism Culture & Events & Corporate Services any actions the Board considers are required for inclusion in the 2026-2030 business plan for the site.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1: Torre Abbey Business Plan review 2025

5. Background Documents

Supporting Information

6. Introduction

- 6.1. Torre Abbey's Business Plan has been in place since 2019, it is reviewed annually. A fully revised strategy is now due and the recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Board are welcomed.
- 6.2. The Board will recall that Torre Abbey has 6 key objectives outlined in the plan these are:
- Commercial
 - Raising Awareness
 - Conservation and Environmental
 - Learning and Access
 - Resource and Skills
 - Fundraising and projects
- 6.3. The focus of Torre Abbey's Business Plan is to ensure the site is managed to improve commercial sustainability and improve the heritage offer in the bay.
- 6.4. The 2025 review reflects a period of consolidation and renewed momentum following major restoration work at Torre Abbey. The direction of travel is toward stability, strategic reinvestment, and preparing for the next phase of heritage-led transformation. This is against the context of sustained pressure for all attractions within Torbay to draw paying customers through their doors.
- 6.5. The site is performing positively against regional trends and continues to operate as one of Torbay Council's most significant heritage, cultural, and visitor economy assets. Notable achievements since the previous report to Overview and Scrutiny include;
- Completion of Major Restoration Works - The £2m Torre Abbey Restoration Project was successfully completed in December 2024, with all areas reopened to the public. The project received praise from Arts Council England and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, reaffirming the site's cultural significance.
 - Strengthening of the Collections - The Cary family's permanent gift of the full Cary Collection represents one of the most important enhancements of the Abbey's cultural holdings in recent decades.
 - Sustained Visitor Numbers - Visitor numbers have not only held steady but grown slightly compared with 2024, in contrast to declining attendance at other attractions nationally. Exhibition-led programming remains highly successful, with the Peter Rabbit Easter 2025 exhibition increasing visitor numbers by 49% and admissions income by 63%.
 - Learning from Event Partnerships - While the Bay of Lights partnership in 2024 significantly raised the Abbey's profile, it did not translate into commercial returns and

caused grounds damage that temporarily impacted wedding income. This learning will inform future third-party partnerships. Adjustments were also made for the Bay of Lights trail in 2025

- Progress on Future Capital Development - Torre Abbey secured National Lottery Heritage Fund support for the development phase of Torre Abbey New Beginnings: Chapter One, with preparation work now underway.
- Commercial Challenges Identified - The café continues to underperform and will form a central part of an options appraisal within the forthcoming full Business Plan review

- 6.6. Torre Abbey exemplifies the benefit of places that are culturally rich and which shape community identity. As Torbay's oldest and most significant heritage building—an Ancient Scheduled Monument dating to 1196—Torre Abbey embodies the deep history and identity of Torquay. The Abbey's exhibitions, learning programmes, and volunteer opportunities expand cultural access, support inclusion, and provide meaningful opportunities for young people, families, and schools with the current business plan highlighting a commitment to widening participation across primary, secondary, FE, and community groups.
- 6.7. One of the challenges for Torre Abbey is translating that participation and visibility to improve the financial performance of the site which is also central to Torbay's cultural economy, contributing directly to footfall, visitor spend, and the wider Destination Management Plan. Other issues to be addressed in the new business plan include;
- Increasing financial resilience through targeted commercial improvements and a more robust fundraising offer.
 - Completing the next wave of heritage-led capital investment, particularly the Georgian Chapel and the multi-phase New Beginnings programme.
 - Deepening audience reach through high-quality exhibitions, school engagement, and diversified community participation.
 - Embedding the Abbey as a key driver of Torbay's cultural and visitor economy, with a balanced approach to commercial partnerships and environmental responsibility.
- 6.8 The 2024/25 review positions Torre Abbey as potentially one of Torbay's strongest strategic assets, contributing to heritage, culture, economic growth and community identity fully aligned with the Council's Pride in Place priorities.

7. Options under consideration

- 7.1. There are no alternative options under Consideration

8. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 8.1. The Business Plan uses the resources currently available for the site. It is intended to improve the financial sustainability of the site and create opportunities for income generation and raising the profile of the site.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. None arising from this report however as a Scheduled Monument and accredited Museum, Torre Abbey must meet the standards set by Historic England and the Arts Council, both on behalf of the Department of Culture, Media and Sports.
- 9.2. As Torre Abbey has secured substantial grants from external funders for major capital works in the last 20 years Torre Abbey remains under contract to ensure it is maintained and remains open to the public. If the grant conditions do not continue to be met for 30 years after each grant the money could be reclaimed by the grant giver. The most recent grant was received in 2024

10. Engagement and Consultation

- 10.1. No consultation took place for this report

11. Procurement Implications

- 11.1. None from this report

12. Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

- 12.1. Conservation and environmental concerns are embedded in the business plan with the site team working with colleagues to identify opportunities to improve environmental performance particularly through the capital projects.

13. Associated Risks

- 13.1. There are no risks associated with the report and the risks for the site are referenced in the business plan.

14. Equality Impact Assessment

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act and groups with increased vulnerability	Data and insight	Equality considerations (including any adverse impacts)	Mitigation activities	Responsible department and timeframe for implementing mitigation activities
Age	<p>18 per cent of Torbay residents are under 18 years old.</p> <p>55 per cent of Torbay residents are aged between 18 to 64 years old.</p> <p>27 per cent of Torbay residents are aged 65 and older.</p>	To be addressed in new business plan		Culture & Events & Torre Abbey Team
Carers	At the time of the 2021 census there were 14,900 unpaid carers in Torbay. 5,185 of these provided 50 hours or more of care.			
Disability	In the 2021 Census, 23.8% of Torbay residents answered that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot by			

	a physical or mental health condition or illness.			
Gender reassignment	In the 2021 Census, 0.4% of Torbay's community answered that their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth. This proportion is similar to the Southwest and is lower than England.			
Marriage and civil partnership	Of those Torbay residents aged 16 and over at the time of 2021 Census, 44.2% of people were married or in a registered civil partnership.			
Pregnancy and maternity	Over the period 2010 to 2021, the rate of live births (as a proportion of females aged 15 to 44) has been slightly but significantly higher in Torbay (average of 63.7 per 1,000) than England (60.2) and the South West (58.4). There has been a notable fall in the numbers of live births since the middle of the last decade across all geographical areas.			

Race	In the 2021 Census, 96.1% of Torbay residents described their ethnicity as white. This is a higher proportion than the South West and England. Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals are more likely to live in areas of Torbay classified as being amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.			
Religion and belief	64.8% of Torbay residents who stated that they have a religion in the 2021 census.			
Sex	51.3% of Torbay's population are female and 48.7% are male			
Sexual orientation	In the 2021 Census, 3.4% of those in Torbay aged over 16 identified their sexuality as either Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or, used another term to describe their sexual orientation.			
Armed Forces Community	In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. In Torbay,			

	5.9 per cent of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces.			
Additional considerations				
Socio-economic impacts (Including impacts on child poverty and deprivation)				
Public Health impacts (Including impacts on the general health of the population of Torbay)				
Human Rights impacts				
Child Friendly	Torbay Council is a Child Friendly Council, and all staff and Councillors are Corporate Parents and have a responsibility towards cared for and care experienced children and young people.			

15. Cumulative Council Impact

15.1. None

16. Cumulative Community Impacts

16.1. None