



Torbay Heritage Strategy 2026 – 2031 Part Two

Adopted DATE

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Cover image: Torre Abbey

Introduction

This part of the Torbay Heritage Strategy expands on the objectives set out in Part One. It is organised around a set of stories from the past that are particularly special to Torbay. In each section, we list the places and objects that embody the story today and consider how they should be prioritised and cared for. We also look at the Council services that underpin and interact with heritage in the Bay and acknowledge areas where we hope new understanding will emerge in the coming years.

Heritage services and sector

English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark

Covering the area of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham, the UNESCO Global Geopark designation is the highest level of international recognition an area can be awarded for its extraordinary geology, and linked environment, heritage and culture. It is managed by the English Riviera Geopark Organisation (ERGO) which is made up of a range of agencies including Torbay Council and supported by a wider network of members who share its vision. Torbay Council hosts the ERUGGp Co-ordinator.

UNESCO Global Geopark designation is subject to review every four years. The English Riviera was successfully revalidated in 2023, meaning that the area, provided it continues to adhere to the UNESCO International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme Statutes and Guidelines, retains the status until 2027.

Spatial planning

The Spatial Planning Team plays a key role in protecting and enhancing Torbay's historic and natural environment. This principle has shaped strategic decisions on the location and scale of development and informed the preparation of placemaking, design and heritage policies that safeguard and encourage investment to improve the Bay's distinctive character. As the Local Plan is reviewed and updated, the Spatial Planning Team will continue to ensure that growth is planned sensitively and that development within historic and environmentally sensitive settings is appropriately guided. The Council recognises the importance of maintaining sufficient expertise and resources to support this function.

Conservation Area Appraisals

An appraisal defines the characteristics of a Conservation Area and evaluates what makes it special. It enables developers, Council members and planning officers to assess the impact of a proposed development and it is a key tool in managing change within historic urban areas. Torbay has 24 Conservation Areas with a high concentration (16) in Torquay, many of which are adjoining. Thanks to Torbay Heritage Place, Torbay Council has embarked on a programme of updating our CAAs and developing Conservation Area Management Plans (CAMPs) to provide up-to-date tools for today's development context, to engage building owners and to foster pride in local areas. We are developing a new, collaborative approach to producing CAAs and CAMPs with the active participation of local communities and intend to continue the programme throughout the period of this Strategy.

Museums

Torquay is home to three accredited museums: Torre Abbey, Torquay Museum and Brixham Heritage Museum. Paignton Heritage Centre has also recently been established at Paignton Library. Between them, they house collections of impressive range and richness, and every year they welcome thousands of local visitors and tourists to exhibitions and events. The Quarternary Caves Collection and Archive held at Torquay Museum has been recognised by Arts Council England as being of national and international significance. Torre Abbey is owned by Torquay Council while Torquay Museum, Brixham Heritage Museum and Paignton Heritage Centre are run by independent organisations.

Archive and local studies services

Local authorities are required to provide an archive service that acts as a place of deposit for all official records. They are also treasure troves of documents, photographs and recordings relating to local people and places. Archive collections are the cornerstone of historical research and maintaining access to them is fundamentally important to a dynamic understanding of our past. Archive collections relating to Torquay have always been integral to Devon Archives and continue to be held at Devon Heritage Centre in Exeter. The service is managed by the South West Heritage Trust under a contract with Torbay Council. The arrangement means that material relating to Torbay is cared for to the highest standard and remains at the heart of the county's written record. A service introduced in 2020 allows local people to pre-order documents from Devon Heritage Centre to be viewed at Torre Abbey in quarterly sessions, an initiative supported by Torbay Council.

In addition, extensive local studies records are held at Torbay's public libraries, managed by Libraries Unlimited, and local independent museums. These collections offer a wide range of

resources such as rare books, parish registers, newspapers and census information to local historians and family history researchers. At the time of writing, Torquay Museum is pursuing UNESCO Memory of the World status for its archive collections.

Historic Environment Record

Historic Environment Records (HER) bring together information relating to landscapes, buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas and archaeological finds within local authority areas. The Torbay HER provides essential information to inform planning decisions and it is available for public enjoyment, benefit and use. It is currently managed by the Historic Environment team at Devon County Council under a contract with Torbay Council. The administrative history of Torbay's HER has led to a backlog of entries accumulated in past years that is not covered by this arrangement. Torbay Council is committed to finding a solution to avoid historical and archaeological information being missed in the planning process.

Heritage destination marketing

As set out in Part One, there is clear potential to grow the audiences for heritage-led tourism in Torbay. We intend to build on our relationship with ERBIDCo and the private sector to achieve this as part of our ambition to reposition the English Riviera as the UK's premier holiday resort of the future.

Heritage sector development

A thriving heritage sector depends on a mutually supportive network of diverse organisations that can share information and work together. The recent establishment of the Torbay Culture and Heritage Forum, facilitated by the Council's Culture and Heritage team, is a very positive development.

Integrated heritage

Experiencing, enjoying and caring for heritage can bring a huge range of social, cultural, economic, health and environmental benefits. We believe that our approach to heritage must be integrated with across all aspects of Torbay Council's work.

Climate emergency

In 2019, Torbay Council declared a climate emergency. Torbay Council is a partner of and supports the work of the Devon Climate Emergency Response Group, which is aiming to help us get to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 at the latest and prepare Devon for the necessary adaptation to infrastructure and services required to respond to climate change. As described in

‘Vulnerabilities’, heritage assets are at risk from a changing climate and have a role to play in decarbonising.

Objectives

ID	Objective	Measures of success	Partners
SEC01	Everyone in Torbay, including looked-after children, people with disabilities and/or support needs, and those who face barriers to participation and opportunity, can access, experience and enjoy heritage.	Torbay Council heritage site managers and colleagues in social care and social services work together to identify opportunities to benefit service users. Our interpretation and communication of heritage reflects and gives voice to diverse audiences. Visitor data from our sites shows increasingly diverse visitor profile. Organisations in the wider heritage sector are supported to improve inclusivity.	Local community, health and heritage organisations
SEC02	Torbay attracts more visitors seeking a heritage destination.	Heritage features in bay-wide destination marketing and campaigns. Online visitor information specific to heritage is easily accessible and high profile. Key heritage attractions promote links to other heritage sites. Increase in percentage of visitors citing heritage as a reason for visiting.	English Riviera BID
SEC03	Torbay’s heritage sector is strong, connected, inclusive and collaborative.	The Torbay Culture & Heritage Forum is established and self-sustaining, and includes organisations of all sizes.	Local heritage organisations

		Increased numbers of volunteers and voluntary opportunities across the sector. Partnership projects are successful in working strategically and attracting external funding.	
SEC04	Heritage assets in Torbay are protected from the effects of climate change and carbon reduction is central to their management.	New flood defence schemes recognise local distinctiveness in design and materials and take into account relationship to heritage assets. All Torbay Council owned heritage assets are managed to take into account climate issues including flood risk, rainwater and heat protection, effects on building fabric, underlying stability, suitable planting, pests and invasive vegetation. Updated Conservation Area Appraisals assess risks from climate change. Guidance for building owners includes reference to mitigation and/or carbon reduction measures. Sustainable transport to all key heritage sites is encouraged and supported.	Transport and community partners
SEC05	The special and distinctive characteristics of Torbay's Conservation Areas are, where appropriate,	All Conservation Area Appraisals and Conservation Area Management Plans are reviewed, updated and adopted where necessary. Building owners and managers in Conservation Areas feel supported.	Building owners, developers and local communities.

	preserved and enhanced.	Proposals that enhance heritage assets or their setting are supported, subject to Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan policies.	
SEC06	Building owners, retailers and developers are encouraged and equipped to enhance the built environment in historic areas.	Proposals for new developments which enhance or better reveal the architectural heritage of their setting are supported. Shop front design guides for Torquay, Paignton and Brixham are published and promoted. New design guidance Building owners and communities are supported to enhance their local historic environment.	Building owners, managers and developers
SEC07	Public spaces in historic areas are easy to navigate and, if possible, enhanced by appropriate street furniture and signage.	Unnecessary street furniture and signage is removed. Design of all new and replacement street furniture references and enhances the architectural heritage of its setting. Wayfinding in the public realm clearly and consistently aids navigation to key heritage sites and around the historic environment without unnecessary visual intrusion.	
SEC08	Walking and cycling to Torbay's heritage sites and in the historic environment	Key heritage sites are integrated into the new Torbay Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.	Local heritage organisations

	is easy, enjoyable and popular.	Promotion of walking and cycling is integral to all heritage site visitor information.	
SEC09	Collections related to Torbay within the Devon Archives are secure, well managed and where appropriate, easily accessible.	The current service is maintained. Projects to enable further conservation, cataloguing and research of Torbay collections are supported. Torbay residents are actively engaged in archive research and enjoy easy access to the collections.	South West Heritage Trust
SEC10	Torbay's Historic Environment Record is comprehensive and well managed.	The current service is maintained. The backlog of entries is added.	Devon County Council
SEC11	National and international visitors are attracted to the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark (ERUGGp). Visitors and residents experience, enjoy and understand the Geopark through easily accessible, high quality and consistent information and opportunities for	All ERUGGp partners are consistently and actively promoting the ERUGGp as part of their own activities. There is an increase in visitors citing the ERUGGp as a reason for their trip. There is an increase in understanding and engagement among residents. ERUGGp has up to date, well maintained and effective communications tools. English Riviera Geopark Organisation (ERGO) is delivering high quality education and outreach outcomes.	All ERGO members and partners

	engagement at multiple sites.	Wayfinding and interpretation of geology is consistent, high quality and widely available across partner sites and in the wider landscape. Building owners and site managers are well supported to interpret and promote their assets within the ERUGGp brand.	
SEC12	The UNESCO Global Geopark designation is secure for the future and the work of the ERGO is sufficiently resourced to deliver its aims.	Torbay Council is a key ERUGGp partners and are providing the most appropriate hosting for staff. All members of ERGO, their organisations and staff are actively contributing to and supporting the ERUGGp at the same or higher level than in previous years.	All ERGO members and partners
SEC013	Historic assets in the care of Torbay Council are in good condition, sustainably managed and safeguarded for the future.	The social, economic and environmental benefits of Torbay Council's historic assets are being realised for local people. Torbay Council maintains and repairs assets in line with best conservation practice. There is a consistent approach to management across the Council's estate of historic buildings, gardens, landscapes and monuments.	

Our stories

Sites key

High priority for action
Medium priority for action
Low priority for action
Outside Torbay

Geology

As well as creating the tapestry of valleys, ridges, cliffs and beaches that give Torbay its unique character, geology has always shaped human activity here, as we can see in the harbours, farmland, settlement patterns and building materials. It also supports rare habitats for many important plant and animal species.

Torbay is famous for its limestone cliffs and rich, exposed geological heritage, from Devonian reefs to Pleistocene caves. The arms of the Bay are formed by massive limestone headlands at Hope's Nose and Berry Head, while softer Permian sandstone forms the lower lying land. The famous red cliff exposures can be seen around the coast of Preston and Paignton from Corbyn's Head to Roundham Head and beyond. Over many millennia, the action of water on the limestone created caves such as Kents Cavern.

The geology of Torbay was first mapped in the 1830s. Geological pioneers Roderick Murchison and Adam Sedgwick realised that fossils found in the limestones at sites in Torbay, such as Lummaton Quarry, gave vital evidence of what was happening to the Earth 409-363 million years ago. They named this geological period the Devonian, the term which is still used globally today.

Torbay's limestone and sandstone were extensively quarried and can be seen in many buildings such as Torre Abbey and Torquay Town Hall. Quarries also sprang up where the limestone had metamorphosed into marble. In the nineteenth century, Torbay marble was crafted into exquisite interior features, art and jewellery for wealthy customers. Marble objects from this period can be seen in many churches and grand houses in Torbay.

Key assets

Sites

Asset	Heritage Designation	Environmental designation	Ownership	Heritage at Risk Register
Torre Abbey	Grade I listed building Scheduled Monument		Torbay Council	
Ashhole Cavern, Brixham	Scheduled Monument		Private owner	Y
Coast/beaches	n/a	In parts: National Landscape, PRoW, SSSI, LNR, NNR, SAC	Multiple owners	
Windmill Hill Cave, Brixham	Scheduled Monument		Private owner	
Kents Cavern, Torquay	Scheduled Monument	SSSI	Private owner	
Grade I listed churches: Church of All Saints; Church of St John the Evangelist; Roman Church of Our Lady, Help of Christians and St Denis, St John the Baptist Parish Church, Paignton	Grade I listed building		Diocese of Exeter	

Grade II* listed churches: Church of St Luke, Torquay; Church of St Mary Magdalene, Torquay; Church of St Mary, Collaton St Mary; Church of St Matthew, Chelston; Church of St Matthias, Torquay	Grade II* listed building		Diocese of Exeter	
Barton Road Cemetery, Torquay	Registered Parks and Gardens		Torbay Council	
Devonian type locality, Lummaton	n/a	SSSI	Private owner	
Bishops Walk	ProW		Torbay Council	

Other assets

- Exceptional fossil and geological specimen collections and an extensive Victorian geological library at Torquay Museum. The collections include thousands of specimens of Devonian fossil corals and creatures and local minerals. The museum maintains strong links with the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark.
- The UK's only substantial collection of South Devon and Torbay marble objects, held at Torquay Museum. This includes extremely fine and rare work such as inlaid pictures and platters, tables, vases and jewellery. There are also marble samples used at the factories and a selection of photographs of the industry.
- Marble objects in the collections of Torre Abbey

Objectives

ID	Objective	Measures of success	Partners
GEO01	Natural sites where underlying geology is most accessible and	In determining planning applications regard is given to impact of proposals on the condition and public accessibility and	ERGO, local landowners, land managers and developers

	visible are in excellent condition.	interpretation of natural geological features. Proposals for new developments which enhance or better reveal natural geological features are supported. Torbay Council and Natural England are working together to encourage and support site managers and private owners in the conservation and enhancement of natural geological features.	
GEO02	Local stone worked features in churches and other historic buildings are in excellent condition.	In determining planning applications relating to historic buildings, regard is given to the significance of existing local stone features. Proposals for new developments which enhance or better reveal the significance of worked local stone within the historic setting are supported. Torbay Council and Historic England are working together to encourage and support building owners in the conservation and enhancement of historic local stone features and the sourcing of local stone. Torbay Council is conserving and enhancing worked stone features in all historic buildings in our care.	Historic England and building owners including Diocese of Exeter

Early humans

Torbay is home to collections and sites of international importance in the story of human evolution and migration.

At Kents Cavern there is evidence of three of the four human species known to have lived in Britain. Finds at the site include a fragment of jawbone dated to the period between 44,200 and 41,500 years ago, when a brief warm spell between ice ages made this part of Britain temporarily habitable. Scientific dating in 2011 revealed the true age of the fragment and established it as the oldest direct evidence of modern humans in Northern Europe. It has changed how we understand the interaction between modern humans and Neanderthals on the very edge of the habitable world.

The jawbone was originally found in 1927 by Arthur Ogilvy, curator of Torquay Museum. The find came towards the end of a remarkable period of discovery in Torbay's caves that began in the early nineteenth century. A series of explorers were drawn there, most notably the archaeologist William Pengelly who excavated Kents Cavern over a period of 15 years. His finds included tools, animal bones and hand axes from humans who lived over 450,000 years ago. The meticulous methods he developed in Torbay laid the foundation for all modern cave archaeology and his diaries offer fascinating insights into his life and work.

Ashhole Cavern in Brixham was excavated in the nineteenth century and evidence of occupation from the Neolithic to the Roman period was discovered.

Windmill Hill Cave, also in Brixham, is a system of galleries and smaller chambers lying mostly beneath a house in Mount Pleasant Rd. William Pengelly's excavations here in the nineteenth century revealed a rich assemblage of animal remains and flint tools that provided the first evidence for extinct animal species and humans co-existing.

Key assets

Sites

Asset	Heritage Designation	Environmental designation	Ownership	Heritage at Risk Register
Ashhole Cavern, Brixham	Scheduled Monument		Private owner	Y

Chambered tomb at Broadsands	Scheduled Monument		Torbay Council	
Windmill Hill Cave, Brixham	Scheduled Monument		Private owner	
Kents Cavern, Torquay	Scheduled Monument	SSSI	Private owner	
Two bowl barrows at Beacon Hill	Scheduled Monument		Private owner	

Other assets

Torquay Museum holds over 32,000 specimens relating to the quaternary period in South Devon and a unique related archive. This collection is designated by Arts Council England and is of national and international significance. Its highlights are numerous and include:

- KC4 human maxilla, the jawbone that provides the earliest evidence of anatomically modern humans in North West Europe.
- William Pengelly's Windmill Hill Cave and Kents Cavern notebooks, documenting the first excavations to unlock the true antiquity of humans anywhere in the world.
- The oldest bifacial tools discovered in the UK, over 525,000 years old.
- Very early specimens of cave lion and ancestral bear *Ursus deningeri*.
- A selection of Neanderthal tools including very rare leafpoints.
- Unique evidence for cannibalism in the Mesolithic and surviving human DNA in 9,000-year-old bones.

Objectives

ID	Objective	Measures of success	Partners
HMN01	Torbay's story of early human evolution and migration, and the role of archaeological pioneers here, is widely known, valued and celebrated.	The early human story and its discovery is a key feature of all bay-wide tourism marketing and Global Geopark communications.	ERGO, ERBID, key heritage sites and schools.

		Schools and community groups in Torbay are supported and encouraged to engage with prehistoric sites and collections. Torquay Museum is adequately resourced to conserve and interpret its early human collection to a level appropriate to its importance. A higher proportion of visitors are aware of and actively seeking to engage with the early human story when choosing Torbay as a destination.	
HMN02	Visitors and local people experience and enjoy Torbay's internationally important prehistoric sites and collections at multiple locations.	The links between locations and collections is integral to all key sites' communications and interpretation. Key sites successfully attract funding through local partnerships to create excellent public engagement opportunities.	ERGO and key heritage sites
HMN03	Ashhole Cavern is managed appropriately and protected for the future.	A Conservation Management Plan agreed between the landowner, Torbay Council and Historic England, and condition is monitored. A scheme to improve access and interpretation is implemented. Ashhole Cavern is removed from the Heritage at Risk Register. The potential for a wider Monument Management Scheme (MMS) for Torbay is explored.	Historic England and private landowner

HMN04	The chambered tomb at Broadsands is managed appropriately and protected for the future.	A Conservation Management Plan agreed between the tenant, Torbay Council and Historic England, and condition is monitored. A scheme to improve access and interpretation is implemented. The potential for a wider Monument Management Scheme (MMS) for Torbay is explored.	Historic England
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Monastic and medieval

Medieval Torbay was the location of some significant religious sites including Torre Abbey in Torquay and the Bishop's Palace in Paignton, a residence of the Bishops of Exeter for 500 years. Local landowning families also built fine country homes. Outside these impressive buildings, the area was sparsely populated, although it is thought that the extent of settlement may have been under-estimated as evidence is likely to have been obscured by later buildings in the urban areas. New developments in our towns may reveal archaeology that adds to our understanding of this period.

By far the most important building in medieval Torbay was Torre Abbey. It was founded in 1196 and built from stone quarried from Corbyn Head. The Abbey became enormously wealthy and influential, controlling much of the land and activity in Torbay. It is believed that the monks built the first fish quay, giving Torquay its name. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539, Torre Abbey passed into private ownership until 1930, when it was acquired by Torquay Council.

Today Torre Abbey houses a museum, art gallery, event venue and gardens, Torbay Council has secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a major initiative called New Beginnings: Chapter One. It is an ambitious two-part project to reset Torre Abbey in its landscape. The goal is to make the entire site more accessible, sustainable, and financially secure so it can be enjoyed for generations to come. The project will reconnect people with the abbey's rich heritage through creative interpretation of its hidden archaeology and open up Torquay's largest green space, enhancing wildlife habitats and biodiversity, and making the site more resilient to climate change. Chapter One focuses on the Spanish Barn, the former Pitch and Putt, the South Lawn, and the ground immediately around the Spanish Barn. These improvements will allow year-round use, better community access, and essential conservation of the Grade I listed building.

There are also several listed medieval churches in Torbay, the most significant of which is the Church of St John the Baptist in Paignton. It was founded in the twelfth century and has many elaborate and interesting features, including the most spectacular chantry chapel in Devon outside Exeter Cathedral.

Key assets

Sites

Asset	Heritage Designation	Environmental designation	Ownership	Heritage at Risk Register
Torre Abbey	Grade I listed building Scheduled Monument		Torbay Council	
Torre Abbey Chapel	Grade I listed building		Torbay Council	Y
Old Paignton	Conservation Area		Private, multiple owners	
Bishops Palace, Paignton	Grade II* listed building Scheduled Monument		Diocese of Exeter	Y
Spanish Barn, Torre Abbey	Grade I listed building		Torbay Council	
St Michael's Chapel, Chapel Hill	Scheduled Monument		Torbay Council	
Cockington village	Conservation Area		Private, multiple owners	
Higher Brixham	Conservation Area		Private, multiple owners	
Church of St John the Baptist	Grade I listed building		Diocese of Exeter	

Grade II* listed churches: Church of St Andrew, Torquay; Church of St George and St Mary, Cockington; Church of St Mary the Virgin, Brixham; Church of St Mary the Virgin, Churston Ferrers	Grade II* listed building		Diocese of Exeter	
Ilsham Manor Oratory	Grade II* listed building		Private owner	Y
Blagdon Manor, Paignton	Grade II* listed building		Private owner	
Kirkham House, Paignton	Grade II* listed building		English Heritage	
Compton Castle	Grade I listed building Scheduled Monument		NT	

Other assets

- The Cary family archive collection is held at Devon Heritage Centre and includes nearly 8000 documents from the thirteenth century onwards. In 2024, the collection was fully catalogued thanks to funding from The National Archives and is now available to researchers.
- Medieval artefacts in the collections of Torre Abbey, including suits of armour, decorative tiles and stonework.

Objectives

ID	Objective	Measures of success	Partners
MED01	Torre Abbey, including its grounds and collections, is conserved and enhanced, and its future is secure. Local people and visitors experience and enjoy it as a key heritage site, accessible open space and high-profile event venue.	Torre Abbey is financially self-sustaining as an attraction and commercial event venue with integral café. Torre Abbey's setting is well-maintained and connected to wider walking and cycling routes. The public is consulted on the future of the grounds. Local communities use the open space extensively for outdoor recreation. Volunteers are actively engaged in a wide range of roles. Visitor numbers to all parts of the site continue to increase.	Local communities
MED02	The special character of Old Paignton Conservation Area is preserved and enhanced	Design of new sea defences protects the Conservation Area from flooding while recognising its distinct character (see SEC04). Further loss of locally distinctive and historic fabric is discouraged. A Conservation Area Management Plan is developed and adopted.	Building owners, developers and local communities.
MED03	The Bishop's Palace is managed appropriately and protected for the future	No immediate risk of decay. All interested and responsible parties are supported in carrying out an ongoing management plan. The Bishop's Palace is removed from the Heritage at Risk Register.	Historic England and Diocese of Exeter (or any future owner).

Agricultural life

Torbay's combination of fertile soil, sheltered coast and mild climate has enabled people to feed their families well for thousands of years. Small scale farming and fishing were the main occupations of communities here for most of Torbay's past and have created the rural landscape we know today. The agricultural countryside within the South Devon National Landscape is recognised a historic asset of national importance.

Settled farming began in the Neolithic period. Traces of these early farmers are evident in a chambered tomb near Broadsands and burial mounds at Beacon Hill and Barton Pines. Later Iron Age field patterns can be seen at Walls Hill. The local Dumnonii people cultivated the land in their own style throughout the Roman era and beyond, until Anglo-Saxon settlers brought with them an open field system. In later centuries, land ownership was consolidated into manors and estates in the hands of local gentry and religious houses. By the sixteenth century, the land was largely enclosed. It was at this time that the characteristic pattern of small, irregular fields and high Devon hedges emerged. Torbay was productive enough to feed its own population and provide victualling to Navy and merchant ships in its harbours.

People in rural Torbay lived on dispersed farmsteads or in small villages. Cottages and farm buildings were built of local stone and cob and were often thatched. Cockington is the most well-known historic village in Torbay and is cherished for its air of timelessness. Agricultural tools and domestic objects held at local museums, in particular the extensive collection at Torquay Museum, have great potential to connect us to past generations.

Other historic features of the rural landscape include sunken lanes, hedgerows, orchards, ancient trees, village greens and traditional signage. These features create the distinctive character of rural Devon, provide vital habitats for wildlife and give structure to transport routes and green spaces. The rural landscape positively contributes to the setting of many individual heritage assets such as listed buildings.

The semi-natural countryside offers simple and low-cost opportunities to improve physical and mental wellbeing through outdoor exercise, a sense of peace and space, and a connection to the shared past. It is also a working landscape, managed by farming communities whose long heritage continues into a living modern culture.

Key assets

Sites

Asset	Heritage Designation	Environmental designation	Ownership	Heritage at Risk Register
Prehistoric field system at Walls Hill	Scheduled Monument		Torbay Council	Y
Spanish Barn, Torre Abbey	Grade I listed building		Torbay Council	
Conservation Areas: Churston Ferrers, Cockington and Galmpton	Conservation Area			
Conservation Areas: Maidencombe and Shorton	Conservation Area		Private, multiple owners	
Occombe Farm	n/a	LNR, SSSI	Torbay Council	
Two bowl barrows at Beacon Hill	Scheduled Monument		Private owner	
Two prehistoric hilltop enclosures, a ditch system and four bowl barrows, Marldon	Scheduled Monument		Private, multiple owners	
Agricultural landscape including field patterns, orchards, hedgerows, soils	Grade II listing of buildings	In parts: National Landscape, SSSI, NNR, LNR	Multiple owners	

Manor Farmhouse, Torquay	Grade II* listed building		Private owner	
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Other assets

- Torquay Museum houses one of the most important regional folk life collections in the UK. It contains hundreds of rare, pre-industrial rural life objects such as tools and furniture, many in a uniquely Devonian style.
- Relevant archive collections held at Devon Heritage Centre include tithe maps and apportionments, manorial documents, farm account books, sale catalogues, diaries and early photographs of rural life.

Objectives

ID	Objective	Measures of success	Partners
AGR01	The special character of Torbay's agricultural landscape is understood, preserved and enhanced.	Historic agricultural features such as orchards and hedgerows are key assets in the new Torbay Green Infrastructure Plan. Traditional and local materials are used in new developments in rural areas. Proposals that enhance the rural landscape are supported, subject to Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan policies. Regard is given to the impact of proposals on views of and from designated protected areas within Torbay.	Local communities and farmers
AGR02	Access to and around rural areas is easy and enjoyable by public transport, walking and cycling.	Connectivity to and within rural areas is increased through the delivery of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for Torbay.	Torbay Council

AGR03	Walls Hill ancient field system is managed appropriately and protected for the future.	A management plan is agreed between Torbay Council, Historic England and Natural England that explores opportunities under current and future Stewardship schemes, and an ongoing review process is in place. There is no inappropriate furniture on site. Invasive vegetation is under control. Measures have been taken to address erosion and increase understanding and engagement. Walls Hill is removed from the Heritage at Risk Register.	Historic England and Natural England
AGR04	Rural sites with significant historic assets are in Countryside Stewardship where appropriate.	Torbay Council, Natural England, Historic England and landowners work together to identify sites where Stewardship could be beneficial.	Natural England, Historic England and local landowners

Napoleonic era

Torbay's rapid development in the nineteenth century owed much to the Napoleonic wars. Napoleon Bonaparte himself even became the Bay's first star attraction.

The wars prevented wealthy Britons from travelling to mainland Europe, so they began to look for destinations closer to home. At this time, the natural harbour of Tor Bay was frequently used as an anchorage for the Channel Fleet that was protecting England from invasion by Napoleon. The families of high-ranking naval officers visited Torquay, further enhancing the town's reputation. Brixham was an important victualling port, where navy crews could stock up on fresh vegetables, meat and water. Meanwhile, all along Torbay's coast, business boomed for local smugglers of French brandy.

The fear of an attack on England by the French led to a decision to strengthen the coastal defences at Berry Head with a new fort and redoubt to protect the existing batteries. The remains there today represent an exceptionally well-preserved survival from the Napoleonic era that offers great insight into strategic military thinking of the time. The site is managed by Torbay Council for the enjoyment of all, and there is great potential to extend the interpretation of its history.

After the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, Napoleon was captured by the British and held on the warship HMS *Bellerophon*. It anchored in Torbay for two days and caused a sensation. Crowds flocked to glimpse him from the shore and even hired boats to get closer to the celebrity prisoner. He was soon removed to St Helena but by now Torbay was on the map.

In subsequent decades, local landowner Sir Lawrence Palk drove the development of Torquay after being inspired by the Italian architecture he saw on the Grand Tour. Torbay's mild climate and beautiful coastline made it an ideal location to import Italian design ideas, so Palk and local dignitary William Kitson commissioned villas and crescents that recreated a Mediterranean atmosphere. New, exclusive residential areas such as the Warberries and Lincombes became fashionable.

Key assets

Sites

Asset	Heritage Designation	Environmental designation	Ownership	Heritage at Risk Register
Battery Gardens, Brixham	Scheduled Monument		Torbay Council	
Brixham Town	Conservation Area		Private, multiple owners	
Berry Head Forts and complex	Grade II* listed building Scheduled Monument	NNR, National Landscape, SSSI, SAC	Torbay Council	

Other assets

- A letter signed by Napoleon from the collections of Torquay Museum, on display at Torre Abbey.
- A contemporary watercolour painting showing tourists in boats trying see Napoleon on the *Bellerophon*, at Torquay Museum.
- An important collection work by Napoleonic prisoners of war in Dartmoor Prison, at Torquay Museum.
- Paintings, prints and engravings in collections of Torre Abbey showing portraits of Napoleon and his family, battles and his imprisonment on the *Bellerophon*.
- Copy of the death mask of Napoleon in the collections of Torre Abbey.
- A walking stick believed to have been carved by Napoleon when he was a prisoner of war, on display at Brixham Heritage Museum.

Objectives

ID	Objective	Measures of success	Partners
NPL01	Battery Gardens is appropriately managed, maintained and protected for the	Scheduled structures are free from vegetation.	Historic England and local volunteers

	future, and visitors are encouraged to engage with the site's heritage.	A management plan is agreed between Torbay Council and Historic England, and an ongoing review process is in place. Both Napoleonic and WW2 heritage is interpreted and accessible on site.	
NPL02	Visitors and local people experience and enjoy Torbay's Napoleonic heritage at multiple locations.	Napoleonic heritage is well interpreted at key sites (Battery Gardens, Berry Head and Brixham Harbour) and links between sites are highlighted. Greater engagement with Torbay's Napoleonic heritage among visitors and residents.	Historic England and local volunteers

Trawling

This story is specific to Brixham, although its influence has been felt in fishing communities around Britain and northern Europe. In the late eighteenth century, motivated by dwindling catches, Brixham fishermen and boat builders set about creating faster boats that could fish in deep water. The design they developed was known as a Brixham trawler. It was a wooden sailing trawler, about 18-24 metres in length, with a long, straight keel. Its sleek underwater profile and tall rig gave it the speed fishermen needed to reach remote fishing grounds towing a large trawl and return in relatively short time.

The sails of the Brixham trawlers were dyed a distinctive red colour with local ochre to give them extra protection – another example of the influence of Torbay's geology.

To maximise the time spent fishing the rich waters of the North Atlantic, some Brixham men began to spend seasons in the north of England, at Grimsby and Hull. Soon this led to the permanent migration of many fishermen. The design of the Brixham trawlers was copied around the British coast as new ports sprang up to take advantage of the deep-sea grounds that were opening up to faster boats. Brixham retains a shared history with Grimsby, Hull and other deep-sea fishing ports, which arguably have closer cultural links with the town than Paignton and Torquay. By the end of the nineteenth century there were more than 3000 sailing trawlers based at British ports, with a fleet of 400 at Brixham.

Today, Brixham's trawling heritage is evident in the distinctive setting of the harbour and the historic buildings and infrastructure of the town. It is still a busy port with a living cultural heritage of fishing. Trawler design has undergone many changes and only a handful of the original sailed boats survive. *Vigilance* is looked after by a team of volunteers and has recently been undergone a two-year programme of restoration thanks to funding from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. *Vigilance* could be a focus for hands-on heritage skills learning and interpretation of trawling history. She has the potential to offer trips along the Torbay coast that would open up not only fishing and maritime stories, but also natural history and a new view of the UNESCO Global Geopark.

Key assets

Sites

Asset	Heritage Designation	Environmental designation	Ownership	Heritage at Risk Register
Brixham Town	Conservation Area		Private, multiple owners	

Other assets

- The 1926 Brixham trawler *Vigilance*, managed by voluntary group Friends of the *Vigilance*.
- Fishing and ropemaking exhibition and photographic collection at Brixham Heritage Museum.
- Extensive shipping records relating to the Port of Brixham held at Devon Heritage Centre.

Objectives

ID	Objective	Measures of success	Partners
TRW01	The special character of Brixham Town Conservation Area is preserved and enhanced.	Further loss of natural, local slate roofing is discouraged and its use is supported in new buildings and restoration works. Creative interpretation of Brixham's distinctive heritage is accessible in the public realm.	Building owners, developers and local communities.
TRW02	<i>Vigilance</i> is functioning as a high quality, popular heritage asset for Brixham, engaging residents and visitors with trawling history and natural heritage.	Excellent programme of public engagement and permanent interpretation on and around <i>Vigilance</i> is planned and supported.	Friends of the <i>Vigilance</i>

Golden age of the resorts

The modern characters of Torquay and Paignton have been shaped in large part by their history as seaside resorts. As we have seen, tourists began visiting in large numbers in the nineteenth century, starting an explosion of development and a 'golden age' of prosperity that lasted until the Second World War. The architectural heritage from this period includes large numbers of villas, civic buildings, shops, churches, entertainment spaces, public gardens and tourist infrastructure. In Torquay, the town's former wealth is evident everywhere in the grand style of its historic buildings and open spaces. The maintenance of this heritage presents particular challenges in an area tackling deprivation today.

The scale of development during this period means that late Georgian, Victorian and early twentieth century architecture is prominent in both towns and makes up the majority of the built environment. This is where most interaction with Torbay's heritage happens, as people move through the urban environment, rather than during intentional visits to historic sites. Many of these buildings are listed and fall within Conservation Areas.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the resorts' buildings, gardens and artefacts is the influence of Italianate design. It was consciously imported and reimagined in an effort to create a Mediterranean-style resort in a northern European setting – an 'English Riviera'. It inspired the Italianate garden at Lupton House, which is now at serious risk of decay. Recognising this style, protecting surviving examples and taking new inspiration from it are essential if we are to retain and enhance the special qualities of our resorts.

Wealthy people first came here for their health, particularly to escape cold winters in the rest of Britain. This heritage of healthcare and relaxation has many parallels with today's interest in wellbeing. Later tourists came for summer holidays and entertainment. New theatres and concert venues attracted the most prestigious acts from London for the summer season. The most iconic of these buildings is the Pavilion in Torquay. It is currently vacant and funding is being sought for its full restoration and active re-use. As an emblem of Torbay's special entertainment heritage and a unique landmark, it is imperative that a commercially viable new use is found for the building.

Many wealthy families who were attracted to Torbay settled and built large homes here. The most well-known and extravagant of these is Oldway Mansion near Paignton, built by the American sewing machine manufacturer Isaac Singer. Later in its life, the building was used as offices for Torbay Council, which still owns it. Oldway Mansion has been empty since 2013 and is now in urgent need of substantial investment for its restoration and re-use. Torbay Council has a Masterplan for Oldway and elements of phase one are currently being delivered.

Key assets

Sites

Asset	Heritage Designation	Environmental designation	Ownership	Heritage at Risk Register
Oldway Mansion (house)	Grade II* listed building		Torbay Council	Y
Torquay Pavilion	Grade II listed building		Torbay Council	
Paignton Picture House	Grade II* listed building		Paignton Picture House Trust	Y
Lupton Park	Registered Parks and Gardens		Lupton House Trust	Y
Oldway Mansion (grounds)	Registered Parks and Gardens		Torbay Council	Y
Lupton House	Grade II* listed building		Lupton House Trust	Y
Roundham and Paignton Harbour	Conservation Area		Private, multiple owners	
Torquay Harbour	Conservation Area		Private, multiple owners	
Conservation Areas: Abbey Road, Babbacombe Downs, Barton, Belgravia, Cary Park, Chelston,	Conservation Area		Private, multiple owners	

Lincombes, Maidencombe, Polsham, St Marychurch, Tormohun, Torre, Upton, Warberries, Watcombe Park				
Cockington Court	Grade II* listed building		Torbay Council	
Hesketh Crescent, Torquay	Grade II* listed building		Private, multiple owners	
Watcombe Park and Brunel Manor	Registered Parks and Gardens		Part owned by Torbay Council	
Princess Gardens and Royal Terrace Gardens	Registered Parks and Gardens		Torbay Council	Y
Coast/beaches	n/a	In parts: National Landscape, PRoW, SSSI, LNR, NNR SAC	Multiple owners (Shoreline Management Plan)	
Babbacombe Cliff Railway	Within CA but no designation of assets		Torbay Council	
Grade II* listed buildings: 1-15 Wellswood Park Road, Torquay; 163 Newton Road, Torquay; Aylmer, Brixham; Beacon	Grade II* listed building		Private owners	

Terrace, Torquay; Hatley St George, Torquay;				
Little Theatre, Torquay	Grade II* listed building		TOADS Theatre Company	
Bishops Walk	n/a	PRoW	Torbay Council	
Castle Tor	Registered Parks and Gardens		Divided, private owners	
Coleton Fishacre (house)	Grade II listed building		NT	
Coleton Fishacre (park and gardens)	Grade II* listed building		NT	

Other assets

- Extensive archive collections documenting the growth of the resorts held at both Torquay Museum and Devon Heritage Centre.
- Social history artefacts including shop signs and costumes from the period at Torquay Museum.
- The Seaside Fun gallery at Torre Abbey which includes several contemporary paintings of fashionable visitors and locals enjoying the resorts in the nineteenth century.

Objectives

ID	Objective	Measures of success	Partners
RST01	Oldway Mansion, including its outbuildings, gardens and pleasure grounds, is where appropriate, conserved and enhanced, and its future is viable, sustainable and secure. Local people and visitors experience and enjoy it as a key heritage site and accessible open space.	Short term grant funding is successfully secured to stabilise the building(s) and works complete. Medium to long term programme of fundraising for delivery of Oldway Masterplan is in place and works in progress where funding allows. Local communities use the grounds extensively for outdoor recreation.	Historic England and local communities
RST02	Torquay Pavilion is conserved and where appropriate enhanced, with a viable and sustainable commercial use.	The building is safe to access, further decay has been halted and a programme of restoration is in place. Appropriate long-term management of the building in line with its cultural and historic value is agreed. Proposals which conserve and enhance the building and find appropriate new uses for it will be supported.	Historic England and all interested parties
RST03	Lupton House is conserved and where appropriate enhanced, and its Italianate garden is	There is ongoing constructive engagement between all interested parties including Torbay Council, Lupton House Trust and Historic England.	Lupton House Trust and Historic England

	restored and maintained.	A management plan is agreed and operational, and Lupton House Trust are appropriately supported to deliver it. The building is secure and deterioration is halted. The Italianate garden is in a programme of restoration.	
RST04	Princess Gardens and Royal Terrace Gardens are maintained and protected for the future	The Gardens continue to be maintained to a high quality. The Gardens are removed from the Heritage At Risk Register. Historic parks and gardens are key assets in the new Torbay Green Infrastructure Plan.	Local communities
RST05	The special characters of Roundham and Paignton Harbour and Torquay Harbour Conservation Areas area preserved and where appropriate enhanced.	Further loss of historic fabric is discouraged. Walking and cycling in these areas is encouraged. A Conservation Area Management Plan is developed and adopted.	Building owners, developers and local communities.
RST06	Babbacombe Cliff Railway is recognised as a heritage asset and is protected for the future.	Babbacombe Cliff Railway is appropriately managed and conserved	Babbacombe Cliff Railway CIO.

Agatha Christie and writers on the Riviera

Torbay has a rich literary heritage, with world famous novelist Dame Agatha Christie as its figurehead.

Agatha Christie was born in Torquay in 1890. She began writing crime stories while volunteering as a nurse and dispenser at the Torquay Town Hall Red Cross Hospital during the First World War. It was here that she gained her knowledge of poisons. Her characters from this time were based on people she observed on the Torquay tram. She also met some of the Belgian refugees who sought sanctuary in Torbay, and from them she took the inspiration for her most famous detective, Poirot.

She was a keen cinema goer and she had a favourite seat at the Paignton Picture House, which will re-open to the public in 2027 thanks to significant investment and work in recent years . Locations in her novels are often inspired by local places, for example Kents Cavern. Her beloved holiday home, Greenway, above the River Dart, provided the setting for several fictional murders. The house is now run by National Trust and houses an important collection of Christie artefacts.

Greenway is a place of pilgrimage for Agatha Christie fans, but other sites associated with her are not yet fully integrated into Torbay's tourism offer. In 2025, a statue of her by artist Elisabeth Hadley was unveiled in Torquay as part of the town's harbourside improvements. It has the potential to be a focal point for further developing tourism themed around Christie and her stories.

While Agatha Christie may be Torbay's most famous daughter, many other writers stayed and produced work here, where the beauty and sea air was believed to be restorative and inspiring. They included Oscar Wilde, Mary Shelley, T.S Elliot, and many others.

Torbay is within the area covered by Exeter's UNESCO City of Literature status, and indeed links with Agatha Christie are among the reasons for the designation. We intend to fully explore opportunities resulting from the status that could further promote our literary heritage and support a vibrant culture of writing in the Bay.

Key assets

Sites

Asset	Heritage Designation	Environmental designation	Ownership	Heritage at Risk Register
Paignton Picture House	Grade II* listed building		Paignton Picture House Trust	Y
Kents Cavern, Torquay	Scheduled Monument	SSSI	Private owner	
Church of All Saints	Grade I listed building		Diocese of Exeter	
Greenway	Grade II* listed building	National Landscape	NT	

Other assets

- The UK's only museum collection of Agatha Christie ephemera and memorabilia, held at Torquay Museum. Its 1,000 items include books and first editions, costumes from television adaptations, a set from ITV's Poirot and a large collection of souvenirs, film and theatre programmes, film posters and fan items.
- Almost 21,000 items at Greenway, collected and treasured by the Christie family over several generations.
- The Agatha Christie Potent Plants Garden at Torre Abbey, featuring poisons used in her books.

Objectives

ID	Objective	Measures of success	Partners
LIT01	Paignton Picture House is fully restored, is well used by the community and is an anchor heritage site within a regenerated town centre.	The restoration of Paignton Picture House is complete and there is an ongoing programme of maintenance and conservation. Paignton Picture House Trust is well managed and sufficiently resourced to deliver the business plan and manage its ongoing use. Paignton Picture House is integrated into the programme of wider town centre regeneration.	Paignton Picture House Trust and Historic England.
LIT02	People seeking an Agatha Christie experience are attracted to Torbay in significant numbers.	A strong relationship with the National Trust integrates Greenway into Torbay's Agatha Christie offer. Greenway is included as a key destination in sustainable transport planning in Torbay. The Agatha Christie Festival is appropriately supported and promoted and continues to thrive. Collaboration between sites and organisations that have Agatha Christie collections or associations is supported and encouraged. Visual links to Agatha Christie in the public realm are clearly marked and celebrated. Increase in visitors citing Agatha Christie connection as a reason for visiting.	ERBID, the National Trust and other key sites

LIT03	Visitors and residents experience, enjoy, understand and contribute to Torbay's literary heritage.	Torbay's literary heritage is promoted and celebrated. Schools and community groups in Torbay are supported and encouraged to engage with literary heritage in creative ways. Literary heritage is a foundation for supporting new work by local writers.	Local creative arts organisations and communities
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Emerging stories

Our understanding of Torbay's past evolves constantly as new discoveries are made and the preoccupations of our own time change. Torbay Council encourages activities that uncover historical evidence, listen to unheard voices or re-evaluate established stories through new lenses.

Over the next five years, we expect to understand more about a range of topics, including:

Romans and Romano-British Torbay

Until recently, little was known about Torbay during the Roman occupation of Britain. Archaeological finds at Ipplepen, just outside Torbay, have revealed that official Roman involvement in our region, on the fringes of the Roman Empire, could be greater than previously thought. The finds have recently been accessioned to Torquay Museum. In recent years, excavations at two Romano-British farmstead enclosures in Torbay have shown a marked difference in the abundance of Romano-British material, which possibly indicates very localised variations in how local communities embraced 'Romanisation'. There is much still to be learned about Roman-era Torbay and we hope that archaeology will continue to enrich our understanding in the coming years.

Marble industry

Research by the team at Torquay Museum has shed new light on Torbay's marble industry, a significant story that had been almost forgotten. In the nineteenth century, Torbay had a natural supply of high-quality marble and plenty of wealthy customers eager to buy luxury fittings for their new villas and mansions, fashionable marble jewellery and exclusive souvenirs. Many local people were employed in the industry, as quarrymen, engineers, designers, masons, craftsmen and retailers. Torquay marble can be seen in most grand houses and churches of the period in Torbay, including Oldway Mansion.

Torquay Museum holds a collection of impressive artefacts but more work is needed to identify Torbay marble features and objects as local marble is often mislabelled. To better understand the history of the industry and its potential for public engagement, it is also necessary to establish the condition and accessibility of quarry sites and to track down relevant archive material.

Smuggling

The success of Brixham's annual pirate festival offers an opportunity to engage a wider audience with the town's real and more complex history through related maritime topics. Smuggling has a long history in Brixham with social, economic and cultural impacts. The smuggling exhibition at

Brixham Heritage Museum is a way into the subject that could be extended via more research to establish and connect relevant sites in the town.

Recent decades

Torbay Council believes that recent history should be recognised, recorded and valued, and that all our communities should have the opportunity to contribute to our shared narratives. Therefore, we encourage new research and interpretation of the Bay's twentieth and twenty-first century heritage. Since the Second World War, many people have settled in Torbay from elsewhere, particularly from other parts of the UK and Eastern Europe. Their experiences enrich our culture and are part of Torbay's story.

We recognise that priorities may emerge relating to these or other topics during the life of the Torbay Heritage Strategy, and it must have the flexibility to incorporate new objectives and actions accordingly.

This document can be made available in other languages and formats.

For more information please contact [**Future.Planning@torbay.gov.uk**](mailto:Future.Planning@torbay.gov.uk)

