

Investment Fund Strategy:

September 2016 revision

Background

As part of its efficiency plan and transformation programme the Council needs to increase its future local taxbase income (Council tax and NNDR) by investing capital resources within Torbay to stimulate growth. Capital resources could be a combination of asset purchase, co investment in projects or capital loans.

As clarification the following descriptions have been used

- “Investments – Yield” .These are property purchases where the objective is to increase rental income to the Council
- “Investments – Taxbase” .These are property purchases where the objective is to increase NNDR or Council tax income to the Council
- “Investments – Loans or Co Investment” .These are loans to business for capital expenditure where the objective is to increase rental income to the Council or to increase NNDR or Council tax income to the Council. Co Investment is where Council with another investor provides finance or jointly purchases.
- “Property Purchase” – property to include purchase of land and/or buildings

This appendix sets out an appropriate strategy for the management of the Investment Fund including purchases/investments. The strategy adopted should reflect a suitable balance between the risks inherent in the types of property/investments to be acquired and the financial rewards obtainable whilst limiting risks appropriately. In addition, the portfolio of investments being acquired should be diversified in order to spread risks via a balanced portfolio, such diversification principally being across geographical location and the use type of properties held.

The risks of investing in property may be mitigated through the acquisition of assets with secure, long income streams. This needs to be balanced against the requirement for a given level of income yield on capital invested in a careful and controlled manner, with specific analysis of risk criteria carried out in the ‘due diligence’ stage prior to the completion of each purchase.

Objective:

	Investment - Yield	Investment - Taxbase	Investment- loans & co investment
Objective	Increase revenue streams	Increase NNDR & Council Tax income	Increase revenue streams Increase NNDR & Council Tax income

To invest in commercial investment properties to provide income (rental or increased NNDR or a combination of both) from investments with a minimum income return over the medium-term of 6.5%

(or 2% above capital costs) on capital invested, through a balanced strategy of acquisition, retention and management of good quality property investments.

The objective is specifically to acquire income-producing property in order to enhance Council revenue streams in combination with investments in potential development sites and development schemes within Torbay. Long-term growth of capital values is also an objective where possible but not a key focus.

Scope:

	Investment - Yield	Investment - Taxbase	Investment- loans & co investment
Scope	Maximum £50m in total		

Strategy:

	Investment - Yield	Investment - Taxbase	Investment- loans & co investment
Maximum individual Purchase	£5m	£5m	£2m

Achieving a spread of risk across a greater number of assets and by acquiring properties across the range of different property asset classes, namely retail, leisure, office and industrial, is to be desired, however it has to be recognised that opportunities to do this may not arise, and ultimately if individual business cases are robust groupings in any individual property class should not pose any increased risk to the Council.

The principle of being relatively risk-averse by limiting fresh investment to properties with minimum unexpired lease terms of five years at the date of acquisition, and with tenants of strong financial standing, will be adopted.

Properties will be acquired to hold rather than to dispose.

Minimum and maximum yield

	Investment - Yield	Investment - Taxbase	Investment- loans & co investment
Yield	Rental	NNDR	Loan repayments or rental
Minimum Yield Required (before costs)	6.5% of purchase price (or 2% above estimated borrowing costs)	Increased Council NNDR income (after multiplier) equivalent and/or rental yield to 6.5% of purchase price (or 2% above estimated borrowing costs)	6.5% of investment value (or 2% above estimated borrowing costs) If capital loan prevailing borrowing rates + 2%
Maximum Yield	10%	10%	10%

Benchmarked Yield (linked to rate/size)	Yes	Yes	Yes
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Acquisitions of assets will be pursued at a target minimum yield (before costs) of 6.5% and, as a guide to potential risk, maximum yield of 10.0%. Assets producing initial yields in excess of 10.0% are likely to exhibit high risk characteristics, such as very short unexpired leases, or financially weak or insubstantial tenants, or obsolete buildings and are therefore to be avoided. Assets with a projected yield of over 10% will be discounted unless officers can demonstrate that risk characteristics are acceptable and avoid very short unexpired leases, financially weak tenants or obsolete buildings.

Sector spread

	Investment - Yield	Investment - Taxbase	Investment- loans & co investment
Sector Diversification – retail, leisure, office & industrial	Yes - retail, leisure, office and industrial	Yes - retail, leisure, office and industrial	Yes - retail, leisure, office and industrial

Traditionally the highest returns come from the office and industrial sub-sectors. Offices can provide an income return of 5.5% in quality in-town areas and between 7.5% and 8.5% for reasonable quality offices in regional and sub-regional centres. Industrial income yields can range from 6.0% up to 7.5% for acceptable quality assets. The retail sub-sector for prime retail property is lower than comparable office/industrial assets with typical yields ranging between 5% and 7% for high quality in-town properties. On this evidence it is likely that predominantly office and industrial/warehouse will be targeted for acquisition with a lesser emphasis on retail. Leisure and mixed use investments will also be eligible under the strategy.

Residential property tends to be management intensive and requires specialist expertise. It is therefore proposed that this sector is excluded from the Investment Fund strategy.

Locations

	Investment - Yield	Investment - Taxbase	Investment- loans & co investment
Location	National (UK)	Torbay	Torbay
Location – Diversity	25% in any Council area	100% Torbay	100% Torbay

Torbay would be the preferred location for fresh acquisitions of investment properties, so that reinvestment is retained within the local economy and any additional capital expenditure is made in the local area. However, there is a finite and limited supply of property within the local area, and of that supply only a small proportion may be available for purchase at any time. A wider area should also be considered for fresh acquisitions. Taxbase investments, loans and co investments will be for investments only within the Torbay area.

Target assets

The following assets will be sought;

1. Retail investments with the following characteristics;

- Lot sizes between £1m and £5m
- Good locations in town centres or in good out-of-town retail clusters/parks
- Well let to sound tenants on leases with a minimum of five years unexpired terms
- Income yield range from 6.5% to 10.0%

2. Office investments with the following characteristics;

- Lot sizes between £1m and £5m
- Modern specification, likely to be built since 1990
- Good locations in commercially strong town/city centres or in good out-of-town business parks
- Well let to sound tenants on leases with a minimum of five years unexpired terms
- Multi-let properties to be considered with average unexpired lease terms of 3 years, subject to a spread of expiry dates
- Income yield range from 6.5% to 10.0%

3. Industrial/Warehouse investments with the following characteristics;

- Lot sizes between £1m and £5m
- Modern specification with flexible standard layout, built since 1980
- Good locations on major road routes and good access to motorways
- Well let to sound tenants on leases with a minimum of five years unexpired terms
- Multi-let properties to be considered with average unexpired lease terms of 3 years, subject to a spread of expiry dates
- Income yield range from 6.5% to 10.0%

4. Leisure investments, such as public houses, restaurants and health & fitness centres with similar characteristics as above will also be sought.

5. Mixed-use investments would also be potentially suitable additions to the portfolio. These may include a mixture of commercial uses or a mixture of retail and office use. Again, similar characteristics as set out above for office investments will apply.

6. Residential investment – tends to be significantly more management intensive than the types of commercial property investment envisaged under this strategy and requires specialist residential management expertise, so is proposed to be excluded from the strategy under the proposals set out in this report.

Assessment of risks

	Investment - Yield	Investment - Taxbase	Investment- loans & co investment
Independent Valuation of asset	Yes	Yes	If applicable
Condition Survey	Yes	Yes	If applicable
Independent Assessment of Asset Life	Yes	Yes	If applicable
Independent Assessment of Residual value	Yes	Yes	If applicable
Security required	-	-	Yes – minimum 75% of investment/loan
Risk Appetite	Risk averse	Moderate risk	Risk averse
“Green Book” Financial profile over life of asset (IRR)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lease	Tenants of strong financial standing and minimum 5 year unexpired lease term	Tenants of strong financial standing and minimum 5 year unexpired lease term	If applicable
Reputational Issues	No “sin” assets or tenants	No “sin” assets or tenants	No “sin” assets or tenants

A rigorous assessment of all risks is required in each case of fresh investment in order firstly to value each property and then to check its suitability for inclusion in the portfolio. The risks fall into two categories, firstly economic and property market risks in specific property market sub-sectors and locations and secondly asset-specific risks (as set out below). These can be measured and an assessment made of the likely future performance of the investment carried out based on the ranges of likely future rental growth of the property and also the projected disposal price or capital value at the end of the period over which the cash flow analysis is being measured. Financial returns are modelled over a medium-term horizon of five years, based on proposed offer prices, to determine the acceptability of each investment, and can be compared against general market forecasts. Internal Rate of Return (IRR) calculations will be carried out to model the expected cash flows from each investment. The anticipated returns can be modelled on different bases to reflect the range of risks applicable in each case, to ensure that forecast returns properly reflect the measured risks. In this way a Business Case is put together to support each recommended property acquisition.

Asset-specific risks

Income and capital returns for property will depend principally on the following five main characteristics;

- Location of property
- Building specification quality
- Length of lease unexpired
- Financial strength of tenant(s)

- Rental levels payable relative to current open market rental values

Location – this is the single most important factor in considering any property investment. In the retail sector prime or good secondary locations in major regional or sub-regional shopping centres are likely to provide good long-term prospects, or alternatively prime locations in sub-regional or market towns.

Industrial and warehouse property has a wider spectrum of acceptable locations with accessibility on good roads to the trunk road and motorway network being the key aspect.

Experienced knowledge will be required to ensure that good locations are selected where property will hold its value in the long term.

Building specification quality – In office property especially it is important to minimise the risk of obsolescence in building elements, notably mechanical and electrical plant. Modern, recently-built office and industrial property should be acquired to ensure longer-term income-production and awareness of the life-cycle of different building elements and costs of replacement is critical in assessing each property's merits. For town centre retail property trends have been towards larger standard retail units being in strongest demand from retailers.

Length of lease unexpired – At present capital values are highest for long-term leased property and values tend to reduce significantly when unexpired lease terms fall below five years, as owners expect significant capital expenditure to be necessary when leases expire and tenants may not renew leases and continue to occupy. Fresh investments should be made ensuring that diminishing lease terms will not either adversely affect capital value or that significant capital expenditure and voids are experienced. A strategy to dispose of investments before unexpired lease terms reach terms of shorter than three years should be adopted.

Financial strength of tenant(s) – assessment will be required of each tenant of potential acquisitions through analysis of their published accounts and management accounts where necessary. Risk of tenant default in rent payment is the main issue but the relative strength of a tenant's financial standing also impacts upon capital value of property which is let to that tenant and careful analysis of financial strength is a key part of due diligence prior to purchase of investments.

Rental levels – following the banking crash in 2007/8 rental levels fell across most occupier markets, particularly in office and retail markets. As a result rents payable on leases that were granted before 2007 may be at levels which are higher than current rental values. Rents in some sub-sectors have recovered back to pre-2007 levels but care is required in all purchases to assess market rents local to each property to check whether rents payable under leases are above or below current levels, as this will impact on whether growth in rents in the future will be fully reflected in the specific property being analysed.

Environmental and regulatory risks - Risks such as flooding and energy performance are taken into account during the due diligence process on every property purchase.

Reputational risks - A policy on specific types of commercial tenant which may not be acceptable to the Council such as tobacco, gambling or alcohol-related companies should be adopted. Properties tenanted by such companies would not then be considered for purchase. However, this would not necessarily protect the Council in the event of a future transfer of any tenancy to a prohibited company.