

Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny

Date: 8 April 2026

Wards affected: Cockington

Report Title: Cockington Court Business Plan and Operations

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Chris Lewis, Cabinet Member for Place Development and Economic Growth

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to outline the operations of Cockington Court following with the closure of TDA.

2. Background

- 2.1. Cockington Court is a Grade 2 listed historic Manor House set within a large country park. Grant awarded in 2008 enabled the development of Sea Change units to the rear of the Manor House, complementing the Stable Yard, creating a total of 41 business units across the site to support the growth of art and craft businesses intended to support the development of Cockington as a cultural and creative hub. The wider site, including a play park, walled garden and rose garden was managed by the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust.
- 2.2. Cockington Court Business Plan ran until 2021. The current lease between TDA and Torbay Council had been holding over since this time, and the Business Plan hasn't been renewed. The objectives within the Business Plan are:
 - Develop the reputation of Cockington Court in line with the vision for the site
 - Improve the financial performance of Cockington Court
 - Ensure that Cockington Court is recognised as a leading attraction for Torbay

KPI's included:

- Increase overall footfall on the site to 300,000
- Maintain workspace occupancy at 90% or greater
- Increase income received through the Visitor Welcome Point
- Deliver a minimum of 90 weddings with at least 50 of those being converted as bookings for food and drink
- Deliver room hire income to £12,000

2.3. Despite the Business Plan not being renewed, the business model continued to focus on craft and creativity. This has included:

- managing and maintaining occupancy, centred on art and craft businesses in line with the original funding
- providing business support to the tenants (when funding for business support is available)
- delivering a programme of events (Apple Day, Illyria Theatre shows, Sculpture Trail, Easter trail, Halloween, monthly markets) to drive footfall to the site
- to manage the Health and Safety of the Manor House, Stable Yard and Sea Change Units; with the Manor House being a heritage site, this adds complexity to managing health and safety, fire safety in particular as the site was not originally designed with health and safety in mind (unlike assets like EPIC where it was built into the design).

Weddings and room hire failed to generate the income required and have since stopped. An operational decision was made to try and rentalised all the available space as opposed to use vacant space for room hire, in order to increase income. Renting of space has ebbed and flowed as the sector, like many others, are subject to macro-economic factors.

2.4 Following the closure of TDA, and the liquidation of TCCT, officers are reviewing the business plan and operating model for Cockington Court to improve how the site functions and how it performs financially. Those future options are not set out in this report which focusses solely on those areas that have historically been managed by Torbay Council, indirectly through TDA from 2010 to 2024 and directly subsequently. Specifically the Manor House, Stable Yard and Sea Change Units and will be referred to through the report as Cockington Court. The Café (Sevon Dials) is located within the Manor House was acquired as part of TDA's business plan for the site.

2.5 Annually, Cockington Court makes a loss. This has reduced since 2024 as accounting principles have changed resulting in costs such as management overheads and facilities management being removed. The income for Cockington Court comes from car park income (from 1 of the 4 car parks around Cockington Court) and rent received from Stable Yard, Sea Change Units and business units within the Manor House. This is the only income received and is insufficient to maintain a balanced budget for a heritage site with significant on-going maintenance and repair costs.

2.6 A number of income generating ideas have been developed over the years, and these include:

- Opening a Visitor Welcome Point selling craft products; this doubles as an information point for Cockington Court and the wider site
- Acquisition of the Cockington Court Tea Rooms, now Seven Dials
- Managing weddings in the Court; this is now run by the registrars
- Renting rooms out for meetings; whilst this generated some income, offering the space for rental provides greater income potential
- Organising and running events; this generates a small amount of income and contributes to driving footfall to the site and

Unlike Torre Abbey, Cockington Court has multiple entry points therefore a paid entry model cannot be developed without significant cost.

2.7 There are 2 FTE employees located at Cockington Court.

2.8 The café employs 1 FTE and 9 zero hour contract employees. It is located within the Manor House and is a key driver of footfall to the Manor House. The café is open all year round, except for a few days around Christmas and New Year. Staff at the café support the fire safety of the Manor House. This year, the café is estimated to make a loss of circa £20,000. Like many businesses experiencing rising costs, this trading year has been challenging.

3 Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

3.1 To note the content of the report

4 Appendices

None

5 Background Documents

5.1 Cockington Court has its own dedicated website [Home | Cockington Court](#)

5.2 Any vacant property within the site is advertised via RightMove.

Supporting Information

6 Introduction

6.1 Cockington Court has not transferred to the Council yet as there is an outstanding tenancy issue. Work is on-going to resolve this.

6.2 The current lease between TDA and Torbay Council and has been holding over since 2021.

6.3 There has been mixed success in delivering the objectives and KPI's set out in 2.2 of the report.

Footfall for Cockington Court is estimated¹ to be between 200,000 to 300,000 annually. There are various factors which influence this including the success of events, the weather and tourism visitor numbers.

Occupancy rates for the last 3 years has been 74%, 76% and 79%. Maintenance issues relating to the roof have led to the main unit in SeaChange remaining unoccupied for over

¹ A basic footfall counter is located at the front door to the Manor House and record a visitor every time the beam is broken. A visitor number is estimated by halving this number assuming 1 person enters and exits via the main door.

18 months; TDA reserves are being used to undertake the works which should be completed over the summer. Leases remain easy in, easy out; whilst these are beneficial to the tenants, this adds to the difficulty in maintaining high occupancy rates, especially where macro-economic conditions are difficult.

The Visitor Welcome Point (VWP) is well used by visitors and provides a useful point for site wide information and support. It has also been used to showcase products from the tenants as well as other local craft businesses. Thirty percent of any takings is income for the Court. Whilst the VWP does generate income, its operating costs means that it does not make a surplus and future uses of the space are being considered.

The Cockington Court team did manage weddings for a period of time and did see a significant number of weddings at the Court; the registrars have subsequently rented space in the Manor House to run weddings directly. Generating income from food and drink was less successful in part due to limited space from which to provide a wedding breakfast; the layout of the building is not conducive to deliver this. Cockington Court remains a popular venue for small weddings.

Whilst we continue to provide space, when available, for ad hoc room hire, the focus has shifted to rentalising all the available space in order to maximise site income.

6.4 Whilst there is no current Business Plan, the focus for the site includes:

- Managing and maintaining occupancy – tenant selection is limited to creative businesses (art and craft) so there is an on-going recruitment process in place. Given the nature of the businesses, recruitment tends to be sensitive to macro-economic conditions.
- Business support – over the years, funding has been secured to provide business support to businesses across Torbay, which tenants have been able to access, including 121 support. This support has helped primarily with business survival and in some instances accessing new markets and routes to market, but we have seen very limited job growth. For a small number of tenants, footfall remains their key route to market.
- Event Programme – Cockington Court organises a number of events throughout the year to drive footfall to the site. These events include Apple Day, half term trails, sculpture trail, Illyria Theatre events, Easter trail, Christmas events and more recently monthly craft markets.
- Managing Health and Safety of the site to ensure safety of tenants and visitors
- Managing the Visitor Welcome Point

6.5 Since operationally moving back into the Council, there has been no change in management. With TCCT having gone into liquidation, who managed the remainder of the site, now is good time to review the business model. There are perceived synergies with Torre Abbey, so this review is underway.

6.6 Torbay Council, and TDA previously, accessed funding to provide a range of business support, most recently through UK Shared Prosperity Funding. Whilst most of this support was targeted, to focus on carbon reduction, or driving innovation, any business across Torbay could access the support. Take up of this support varied across Cockington tenants, with some engaging fully, partially, or not at all.

- 6.7 For a few tenants, footfall to the site remains their primary route to market and the events delivered at Cockington Court are important. For the first time, the tenants organised and ran a Christmas event, and this is to be repeated in 2026.
- 6.8 Income generation opportunities at Cockington are limited given the multiple access areas to the site. It is the opinion of the Head of Economy that the key opportunity to generate income on the site is via the café, however, investment would be needed to make this work. Such investments would include new point of sale system, upgraded kitchen, off site infrastructure to allow for sale of goods outside the café and such investments would likely be significant. The operation of the café is part of the wider Cockington business model review.

7 Options under consideration

- 7.1 N/a (update report only)

8 Financial Opportunities and Implications

None.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Lease between Torbay Council and TDA expired in 2021 and is holding over. The asset is yet to be moved across to the Council and legal advice is currently being sought as to any legal implications with the expired lease.

10 Engagement and Consultation

- 10.1 N/a (update report only)

11 Procurement Implications

- 11.1 N/a (update report only)

12 Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

- 12.1 N/a (update report only)

13 Associated Risks

- 13.1 N/a (update report only)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18% of Torbay residents are aged under 18 years old. • 55% of Torbay residents are aged between 18 to 64 years old. • 27% of Torbay residents are aged 65 and older. 	Event programme caters for a range of ages and are designed to attract increased footfall to the site.		
Carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the time of the 2021 census there were 14,900 unpaid carers in Torbay. • 5,185 of these carers provided 50 hours or more of care. 	Not relevant		
Care experienced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As of January 2026, there were 277 former care experienced young people aged 18-24 in Torbay. 	Not relevant		
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the 2021 Census, 23.9% of Torbay residents answered that their day-to-day activities were limited 	Access to the site at Cockington are available to all. The Manor House is a heritage building and as such, wasn't		

	a little or a lot by a physical or mental health condition or illness.	designed with accessibility in mind. However, all public access points are accessible.		
Gender reassignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	Not relevant		
Marriage and civil partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	Not relevant		
Pregnancy and maternity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Between 2013 and 2024, the rate of live births (as a proportion of females aged 15 to 44) has been slightly but significantly higher in Torbay (average of 56.0 per 1,000) than the Southwest (53.4) and broadly in line with England (56.3). For the period 2022 to 2024, rates in Torbay (44.6) have been significantly below England (50.0). 	Not relevant		

Race	<p>In the 2021 Census, 96.1% of Torbay residents described their ethnicity as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.6% as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh • 0.3% as Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African • 1.5% as being of Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups • 96.1% as White • 0.4% described their ethnicity another way. <p>• Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are more likely to live in areas of Torbay classified as being amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.</p>	Not relevant		
Religion and belief	<p>The 2021 Census showed that the residents in Torbay identify their religion and/or belief as the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48.5% are Christian • 0.4% are Buddhist • 0.2% are Hindu • 0.6% are Muslim • Less than 0.1% are Sikh • 0.1% are Jewish • 0.7% have another religion • 43.2% have no religion • 6.3% did not answer 	Not relevant		

Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 51.3% of Torbay's population are female. • 48.7% of Torbay's population are male. 	Not relevant		
Sexual orientation	<p>In the 2021 Census, residents described their sexuality as follows;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 89% as Straight or Heterosexual • 1.7% as Gay or Lesbian • 1.1% as Bisexual • 0.1% as Pansexual • 0.1% described their sexuality another way • 7.4% of people didn't answer the question 	Not relevant		
Armed Forces Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. • In Torbay, 5.9% of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces. 	Not relevant		
Additional considerations				
Socio-economic impacts (Including impacts on child poverty and deprivation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Torbay is ranked as the 39th most deprived upper tier local authority in England in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2025. 	Some events delivered such as half term trails and open air theatre are designed for families		
Public Health impacts (Including impacts on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the five-year period 2020 to 2024, data shows 	Access to open spaces such as those at Cockington contribute to wellbeing.		

the general health of the population of Torbay)	there is a 6-year life expectancy gap between males who live in Torbay's least and most deprived areas and, a 3-year gap for females.			
Human Rights impacts		Not relevant		
Child Friendly		Not relevant		

15 Cumulative Council Impact

None

16 Cumulative Community Impacts

None