



Fit
for
the
future

creating a prosperous and healthy Torbay

April 2017

**Transformation Strategy for
Torbay's Town Centres**

Appendix to the Torbay Economic Strategy

1 Introduction

Nothing says more about a town than its centre. It is the place that brings people together from across all its neighbourhoods, as well as from overseas, nearby cities, towns and villages. The centre is a town's heart and will be the part of town that most residents and visitors will know. Rightly or wrongly, it will be the place that determines the view of many people of the town in its entirety. Put simply, town centres matter.

Torbay's town centres are evidently in decline and must change. Torquay and Paignton town centres are, arguably, on the 'critical list' and require immediate attention to turn around their decline. Brixham is showing some signs of under-investment, but not to the same scale as Torquay or Paignton. There is clear evidence of declining footfall and spend, of under-investment in buildings and of a poor experience for people visiting the town centres.

In order to arrest the decline of Torbay's town centres there needs to be much more emphasis on, and investment in, consumer experience. For example, consumers need clear signage to and information about car parking; car parks themselves need to be part of a much better consumer experience; consumers need to understand, implicitly, how a town centre works; there needs to be more on offer in the town centres including leisure, food, events – a greater, much more attractive and vibrant mix of uses; the character and history of a place needs to shine through; digital information is and will become increasingly important to the consumer.

This strategy sets out a phased approach to town centre regeneration. It seeks, firstly, to build market confidence, not least through Council investment. Confidence will lead to greater investment by the private sector in major transformation projects. Confidence and investment will lead to regeneration of other parts of Torbay's town centres and will have wider socio-economic benefits. This phasing is not linear and there will be some blurring or overlap between these key phases.

The Council has previously agreed a number of framework documents that headline the need for growth, change and town centre regeneration. Documents such as Torbay's Economic Strategy, the Destination Management Plan, the Local Plan and Masterplans for Torquay and Paignton Town Centres, and the Culture Strategy provide a broad framework for delivery over the next few years and reference the need for town centre regeneration.

These documents describe the outcomes of successful place making with this Strategy providing a sharp focus for ongoing regeneration work with the emphasis on place making, coupled with high quality development, which delivers a range of benefits to Torbay and will drive further investment.

2 Overarching approach

The following paragraphs are not intended to be prescriptive. They are based on the adopted Masterplans and provide a clear guide as to the future look and feel of Torbay's town centres. The maps provide an illustration of the nature and activities within the Torquay and Paignton Regeneration Zones.

2.1 Torquay

In Torquay, the approach to regeneration is more focused on supporting market delivery; providing a more aspirational retail offer at the lower end of the high street and around the harbour; providing more of a leisure and retail offer from Market Street to the lower end of the Fleet Street; retaining some of the larger retail space to the upper end of Union Street, but encouraging more homes, office space and leisure space; more residents and workers in the town centre; more visitors in the town centre; improved townscape and access; better quality / more accessible parking.

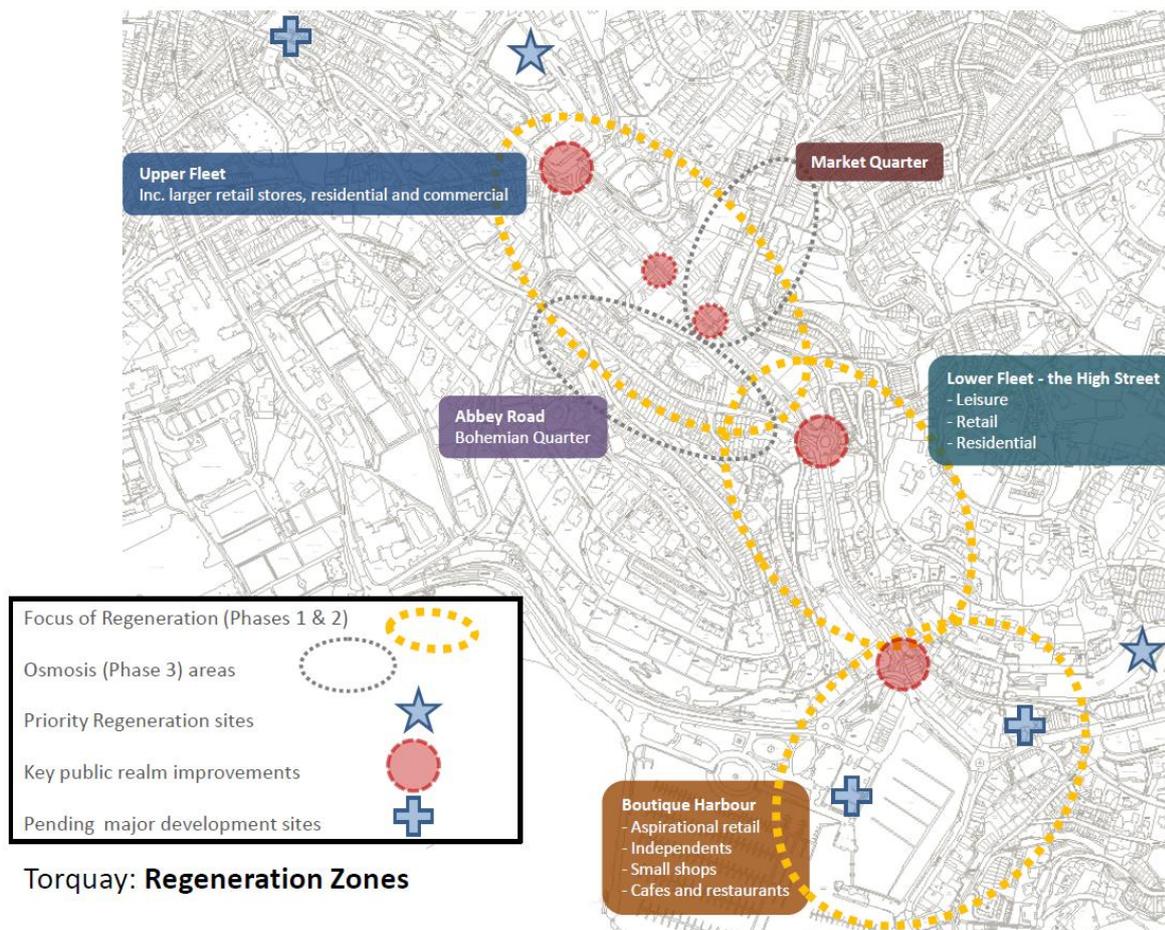
The River Fleet has played a significant role in Torquay's history, but is now hidden beneath buildings and streets. Its identity has been lost. The regeneration of the town centre provides an opportunity to recognise its role, through wayfinding, place marketing, culture, public space improvements etc. It is not intended to expose the underground river, but to raise awareness of its presence and role. It could, once again, provide a role in connecting the community with the coast. This connection, along Union Street/Fleet Street, will be enhanced by removal of a lot of the existing street clutter (such as signs that have no function), improvements to public realm and to building frontages. This will ensure the town centre is more legible, easier to understand and navigate, which will make a significant improvement to consumer experience

The upper end of Union Street, between Market Street and the Town Hall, needs to become more diverse and vibrant, with less small retail space. The market is already promoting that sort of diversity, as occupation by WBW Solicitors helps to demonstrate. This area should continue to provide space to meet the needs of larger stores, such as at Union Square, Boots, the former BHS, but otherwise the Council will incentivise and enable more residential, office space, leisure, cafes and restaurants. In line with the civic nature of this area, the Council will also encourage and enable use of buildings and space for civic uses – which could include a library service and public health provision for example. The character and liveliness of this area will be enhanced by the presence of students and by improved quality of car parking at Lower Union Lane. The Council will support the presence, expansion and value of language schools in this area. These types of uses should encourage more footfall, more spend and ensure this “Upper Fleet” area becomes an area in which people want to spend time. The Lower Union Lane area provides opportunities for comprehensive redevelopment, over the longer term.

The largely pedestrianised area between Market Street and Fleet Walk – the “Lower Fleet” area - will provide the retail focus, particularly towards the lower end, but this will be better blended with an improved leisure offer, living and working space and new retail opportunities. The area around Pimlico provides opportunities for comprehensive redevelopment, that could include more leisure uses (such as a cinema), and for re-use of upper floors for residential purposes.

The Harbour area, one of Torbay's unique selling points, will see more aspirational and/or independent retailers – those not yet present in Torquay. The Council may have to purchase property to provide space, at the right time, to those retailers, as part of a package of incentives for investment. The Harbour will have a high quality food and drink offer and a good leisure offer. This will be encouraged and complemented by high quality public space.

Abbey Road and Market Street will benefit from this investment, better consumer experience and increased patronage.



2.2 Paignton

In Paignton, given the lack of market investment a more interventionist approach is proposed, but with much the same outcomes as Torquay - more people living and working in town centre, which may involve loss of some secondary retail space; improve public realm and physical fabric, especially around the rail and bus station area and main road / pedestrian junctions; better connecting the community with the coast, the town centre and harbour.

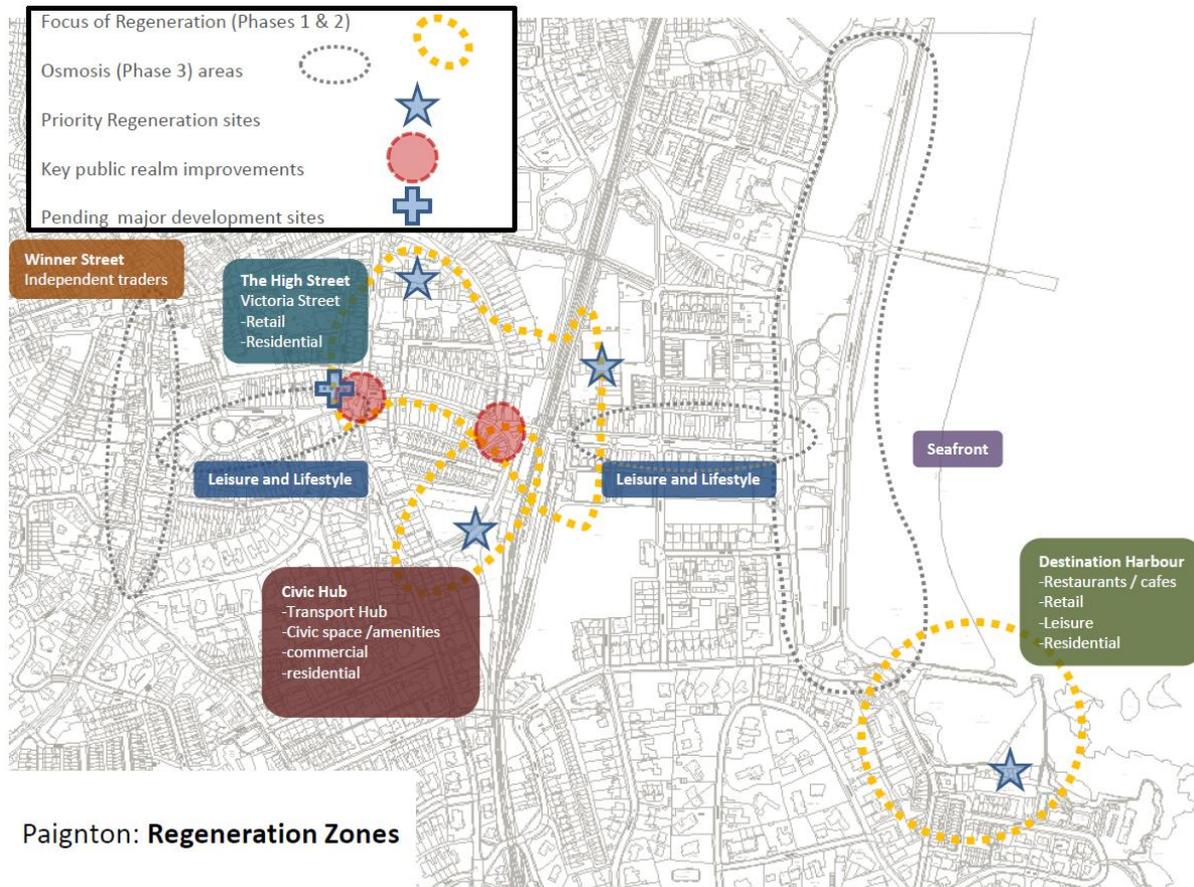
As with Torquay, a key outcome of regeneration will be connecting the community with the coast – better linking Winner Street with the sea front and the Harbour. Improvements to the public realm, especially at key junctions, and improvements to building frontages will restore some of the historic character of Paignton, improving consumer experiences. This will ensure the town centre is more legible, with easier movement around the town and people will be encouraged to enjoy the whole town centre experience – from the Esplanade to Winner Street.

A new civic heart to the town will be created, logically, between the two stations and the library. This will include residential and commercial space and new civic facilities such as health provision. This will complement the refurbishment of the old Paignton Cinema and the steam railway operation. It will enhance the linkage between Torbay Road and Victoria Street.

Paignton Harbour will become more of a destination, not a hidden jewel, whilst also retaining its charm. Existing leisure activities will be complemented by more people living in the area and a better café/restaurant offer.

The redevelopment of Crossways, in the short term, and of the Victoria Centre, probably over the longer term, will add more vitality and vibrancy to the town centre.

Winner Street will benefit from increased footfall and investment, but may well need further funding and support.



2.3 Brixham

The Town Centre Car Park site in Brixham is a recent addition to the town centres regeneration programme. This is timely, in part because the community has produced a major mixed use scheme, including retail, residential, hotel, commercial space, which needs further work to deliver it, but also in part because Fore Street is showing signs of under-investment.

A mixed use development on the Town Centre Car Park site will complement the harbour and existing High Street. It will encourage movement across the town, between Middle Street and Fore Street, and will also provide high quality public space. An essential part of the redevelopment will be car parking, probably in greater quantity than the number of spaces already on site. The development could include food retail, residential, a hotel and other commercial space. Given the previous difficulty delivering development on the site a more innovative approach may be needed, especially if the community and Council want to see development happening in the first phase of regeneration.

2.4 Public Realm

Successful town centre regeneration will not be delivered only by development on priority sites. Experience from other places, such as Bournemouth, and from soft market testing shows that investment in public realm improvements, wayfinding (for drivers and pedestrians), key building frontages and other infrastructure improvements are essential to delivering a wider place making agenda.

Good place making, coupled with high quality development, will deliver community benefits and will increase property values. It will help drive further investment.

Soft market testing has revealed that a number of existing stakeholders and potential retailers consider that the current state of town centres is a deterrent to investment. Public realm improvements are essential to attracting investment. These should also help resolve pockets of social issues in town centres which, unless resolved, will continue to deter investment.

3 Phasing

The approach described below will deliver the outcomes for each town described within this Strategy, but should not be considered as linear. There will be some overlap between phases and further engagement with investors and developers may result in some proposals coming forward earlier or later than expected.

3.1 Phase 1: Confidence

Torbay Council, working with partners, will lead and enable delivery of a number of projects, to show confidence in its town centre regeneration programme and to build confidence in investors and developers. This phase will also give the Council more confidence in its budget position and necessarily makes use of Council-owned land to better ensure pace and scale. This phase of delivery is crucial to the second phase, including, for example, land assembly activity that allows Phase 2 to move forward quickly. Without this phase, phase 2 is far less likely to happen.

3.2 Phase 2: Investment

The Council and TDA will enable and support significant private sector investment that will deliver substantial town centre regeneration and support economic and housing growth in Torbay. The scale and pace of delivery in Phase 2 will be greater than in Phase 1, subject to successful delivery of Phase 1 and key activities, such as land assembly, being resourced. Similarly, resource will be needed to ensure that enabling mechanisms needed for Phase 3 – such as development briefs, Local Development Orders, infrastructure funding – are in place.

3.3 Phase 3: Osmosis

Confidence and investment will result in regeneration of those areas on the edge of town centres – Market Street and Abbey Road in Torquay; Winner Street and the Esplanade in Paignton; Oxen Cove, Freshwater and the Harbour in Brixham. The Council should enable that to happen, through a range of its regulatory functions. Additionally, the use of local labour, skills, apprentices, development companies and associated services as a result of Phases 1 and 2 will have wider beneficial socio-economic impacts on Torbay.

4 Phase 1 of the Town Centres Regeneration Programme

This section identifies the priority sites for Phase 1 of the Town Centres Regeneration Programme. A summary is provided for each site with the delivery actions having been identified following the completion of outline business cases for each site. In each case, the Council will be presented with, and asked to make a decision on, the detail of proposed development, delivery and financing mechanisms for each site.

4.1 Upton Place – behind the Town Hall, Torquay

Summary

This site has been the subject of, and gained planning permission for, redevelopment proposals including significant office/commercial space. The use of this site by a large format food retail store has also been explored. Subsequently the site has been identified for various forms of development in the Local Plan, in the Torbay Town Centre Masterplan and in the emerging Torquay Neighbourhood Plan.

A mixed residential and commercial development on the site has been the subject of soft market testing. Whilst this gained some market interest, there is an opportunity to secure even better outcomes, for the town centre as well as for the economy, through the delivery of student accommodation and/or a Health and Wellbeing Hub on the site.

Delivery Actions

The Council will seek, as the top priority, to deliver student accommodation, for up to 300 full time students, on the site to meet local demand, subject to securing a 'pre-let' arrangement. The Council will seek to deliver the accommodation in time for the September 2019 academic year.

The Council will seek, as a second priority, to provide a health and wellbeing hub (up to 2500 sq. metres) on the site, subject to confirmation by Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust of tenants and funding for that space. This could be in addition to student accommodation and would be subject to a further assessment of parking and revenue impact.

If a health and wellbeing hub is not able to be delivered, the Council will consider the delivery of a second phase of student accommodation (assuming the first phase comes forward), subject to demand, confirmation of a pre-let arrangement and an assessment of parking and revenue impact.

The Council will direct deliver each of the new buildings using its prudential borrowing ability, retaining the freehold of the land and offering leases to occupiers.

If none of the above options are able to be delivered, the Council will pursue a mixed use development on the site, including residential (approx. 85 units) and commercial space (approx. 500 sq. metres). This option would be tested via a formal marketing process with a select number of investors / developers, with the Council helping to de-risk the development (e.g. by use of a planning development brief). The Council would direct deliver a residential and commercial scheme, unless the marketing process revealed that better outcomes could be achieved via a development partnership arrangement.

The Council will include, in any option for residential or student accommodation on the site, the use of some space in Upton Park for use by the residents / students. This is likely to be the redundant

basketball court, but may include other parts of the Park. This will enhance the use and safety of the Park.

4.2 Harbour View – between The Terrace and Museum Road, Torquay

Summary

This site has been the subject of previous development proposals. The Local Plan identifies development potential around the periphery of this site.

The Harbour (Terrace) Car Park is currently used, in part, to support the operation of hotel businesses in the town. Around 40 car parking spaces are 'block booked' by Shearings and the use of a further 60 spaces has been requested by THAT Group to support the Hilton Hotel on Torwood Street. These spaces should remain available to hoteliers following any development on the car park site and should continue to provide valuable revenue income to the Council.

A number of development options are being explored for this site. For the purpose of soft market testing a development of 39 apartments, located to the top end of the car park (the Museum Road end), was assessed. That option has received a significant amount of interest from investors and developers, especially given the success of other developments around the Harbour area (such as Corbyn Sands and Abbey Sands)

Delivery Actions

The Council will seek to deliver a development at the northern end of the Harbour (Terrace) Car Park, within Phase 1 of the Town Centre Regeneration Programme.

The Council will continue to explore options for development of the site, which is most likely to include residential or hotel accommodation, and will produce a development brief for the site to support market testing and timely delivery of development.

The Council will direct deliver that development, subject to formal market testing in April 2017 with select number of national and/or local developers.

4.3 Lower Union Lane and linkage to Union Street, Torquay

Summary

Lower Union Lane Multi Storey Car Park (MSCP) contains 632 parking spaces. The adjoining surface level shoppers car park contains 32 spaces. Together they generate just over £370,000 income to the Council. The MSCP is, on average, just over 50% full. The shoppers car park is 75% full, on average. Each space within the MSCP is used, on average, around 360 times per annum. Each space within the shoppers car park is used more than 2300 times per annum, showing a more frequent turnover of spaces than the MSCP.

The MSCP is tired, unattractive and feels unsafe. This is preventing greater use of the car park. However, the car park is in a good location, has good access to Union Street and larger shops. It is very accessible and has good capacity. Better wayfinding information (e.g. about the location of and capacity of the car park) is required to improve use of the car park. It is estimated that the Council will need to invest around £450,000 in repairs to this car park, within the next 10 years.

There is increasing demand for reserved spaces within the MSCP, from existing and prospective businesses located on or close to Union Street. Refurbishment of the MSCP and the availability of reserved spaces is, for example, important to the re-use of the former BHS building. Improvements to

the car park are needed to overcome perceptions of personal safety before those businesses will commit to 'block booking'.

There is a need to ensure the car park:

- Has a clear role and function as the car park of choice for visitors to the upper end of Torquay Town Centre.
- Is safe, attractive and well used, which in turn reduces annual costs to the Council and increases income.
- Supports regeneration of the upper end of Torquay Town Centre, supporting business relocation and growth and supporting redevelopment (e.g. of the former BHS store).
- Has sufficient capacity to meet growth demands, including demand from displaced parking as a result of development on other car parks.

Refurbishment of the MSCP, and potentially additional capacity at the shoppers car park, needs to be undertaken as part of Phase 1 of the regeneration programme.

It is likely that the business case for refurbishment will be improved by the displacement of car parking from Town Hall Car Park and Harbour (Terrace) Car Park, leading to an increased use of the Lower Union Lane Multi Storey Car Park.

Delivery Actions

The Council will refurbish the Lower Union Lane Multi Storey Car Park, subject to there being a business case to show that investment (estimated at £4-5m) can be justified.

The Council will explore funding options for the refurbishment work, including prudential borrowing.

The refurbishment will include work to improve the covered walkway between the car park and Union Street, alongside the former BHS building. The refurbishment may also include public realm improvements, better linking Union Square with Lower Union Lane Multi Storey Car Park.

The refurbishment work may also include the creation of additional car parking capacity at the Shoppers Car Park and/or on the leased land to the east of the multi-storey car park, subject to completion of a business case that justifies the investment.

4.4 Paignton Harbour

Summary

The site being promoted for a mixed use development, of residential and commercial space, is to the southern side of the Harbour. It is a site currently occupied by a number of businesses, the Harbour Master's office, and a number of clubs, including Paignton Sailing Club and Sea Scouts. The site is immediately to the north of Roundham Car Park. The development would not result in the loss of any car parking spaces.

A number of development options are being explored for this site. For the purpose of soft market testing a development of 30 apartments and 770 square metres of commercial spaces (shops/restaurants) was promoted and assessed. That option has received a significant amount of interest from investors and developers, due to its location and potential.

Delivery Actions

The Council will seek to deliver a mixed use development, comprising commercial space (including shops and restaurants) and residential units.

The Council will work with existing tenants / leaseholders to better assess their requirements and to help unlock the development potential of this area.

The Council will direct deliver that development, subject to formal market testing in April 2017, with select number of national and/or local developers, and will produce a development brief for the site support market testing and timely delivery of development.

If market testing reveals a better, higher quality scheme that delivers better returns to the Council and a greater contribution to the Town Centre Investment Fund, then the Council may pursue that development option via a development partnership arrangement.

The Council will retain the freehold interest in the commercial space and will benefit from revenue for leased space.

4.5 Paignton Civic Hub – Bus/Rail Stations

Summary

This is area around and between the train and bus stations and the library. The intention is to create a new civic space, repositioned bus station, train station enhancement and new commercial and residential space. This links to improved public realm proposals for the area around Victoria Street/Level Crossing/Torbay Road and to the restoration and reuse of Paignton Picture House.

The land is owned by a combination of Torbay Council, Network Rail and Stagecoach. Network Rail and Stagecoach have agreed, in principle, to the broad proposals behind a new Paignton Civic Hub. Stagecoach's ability to move forward with this redevelopment is very much dependent on successful relocation of its depot in Torquay, to allow space for overnight parking and repair of buses that currently takes place in Paignton. Similarly, Network Rail's desire to move forward on refurbishment of Paignton Station and development of land to the rear is dependent on securing a good financial return and finding alternative space for customer parking.

A Growth Deal bid for around £5 million was submitted in 2016, via the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), to kick start the proposed transport improvements for this area. Whilst the proposal received the support of the LEP, and was one of the highest ranking transport schemes, the level of funding from Government to the LEP for Growth Deal 3 projects is less than required to fund this project. Consequently this project will not receive Growth Deal 3 funding. Nonetheless, the co-location of bus and train stations, centred around a more legible civic space, is extremely important to the successful regeneration of Paignton.

Great Western Car Park is located to the centre of this site and is one of Paignton's busiest car parks. It has just 68 spaces, its mean occupancy is 48 and there are 96 days on which it is more than 75% full.

The land to the rear of Paignton Library is one of the options for the delivery of a Health and Wellbeing Hub, to ensure health service provision remains in Paignton Town Centre. A proposal has been provided to the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust and further instruction/information is awaited.

Delivery Actions

The Council will seek, as a top priority, to provide a health and wellbeing hub (up to 2500 sq. metres) on the site, subject to confirmation by Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust of tenants and funding for that space, and subject to a further assessment of parking and revenue impact. The opportunity of sharing services and space with existing services in Paignton Library and Information Centre will be investigated as part of this proposal. The intention is to deliver a Health and Wellbeing Hub by mid-2018, subject to the provisions set out here.

If the Health and Wellbeing Hub does not come forward the Council will seek a residential and/or commercial development on the car park to the rear of Paignton Library and, working with Network Rail and Great Western Railway (GWR), on the Network Rail car park between the library and railway line.

The Council will work with Stagecoach to enable a relocation of its depot in Torquay to unlock the potential of the Paignton site. It will also work with Stagecoach to secure a financially viable solution to a re-orientation of the bus station in Paignton, including the use of Council land and the delivery of commercial and/or residential space. The Council will look to conclude this work within 12 months and seek, with partners, to deliver the project by mid-2019.

The Council will work with Network Rail and GWR to bring forward an improved railway station, including the land immediately adjacent to it, and redevelopment of Network Rail's land to the rear of the station, which is currently used for business and parking purposes. This work is likely to include an assessment of options for the use of Network Rail owned land at Goodrington. The Council will seek, with partners, to provide a clear way forward for this proposal within 12 months and the project to be delivered by mid-2019.

In order to bring forward further phases of delivery, the Council will continue to seek funding for transport and townscape improvements, to maximise the role of this area as a transport and civic hub for Paignton. It will also continue to work with local businesses, business representative organisations and with agents to establish demand and pre-lets for commercial space.

4.6 Brixham Town Centre

Summary

The successful regeneration of this site is crucial to the future of Brixham.

The existing car park is the Council's busiest car park. In 2014/15 almost 275,000 tickets were sold, generating over £400,000 income. Each space generates around £2,230 and is used over 1500 times each year. Consequently it is important to retain or improve the number of parking spaces on site, not only to support the town centre but to enable (if required) delivery of other development proposals, such as at Oxen Cove and Freshwater Quarry, and to ensure revenue income to the Council.

A number of attempts have been made to develop the site, most recently a mixed use development that included Tesco and a 340 space multi-storey car park. This gained planning permission, but was not delivered.

The Brixham community has, very commendably, produced concept proposals for the redevelopment of the site. This is reflected in the emerging Brixham Peninsula Neighbourhood Plan (Policy J6) and the Brixham Town Centre Masterplan that forms part of the Neighbourhood Plan. The community is extremely keen to see development of the site.

The ingredients of the concept plan include a hotel, retail, housing, transport hub, public space, car parking (a greater number of spaces than existing), high quality design and connectivity.

The Council has, via the Town Centre Regeneration Programme Board, undertaken a viability assessment of the community's concept plan. That assessment, whilst acknowledging demand for some of the ingredients of the Masterplan, shows that the development is not viable as it stands. It is estimated, following a property market review and development appraisal, that a funding gap of around £8.5 million exists. That is largely due to the construction of a multi-storey car park, the work proposed for the bus station, public realm work and the need to deal with flood risk issues.

The viability assessment comments that the funding gap is likely to be reduced if the Council undertakes the development itself or if a development partner retains car parking income. The latter option is unlikely to be acceptable to the Council.

Delivery Actions

The Council will use the community's masterplan, and specifically the ingredients of the masterplan, to develop a viable development proposal, including marketing of the site and generating interest from investors and funding organisations.

The Council will work with community representatives on the production of development options and a viable development proposal.

The Council will continue to work with the Environment Agency and other organisations to secure funding for flood alleviation measures in Brixham, to reduce this risk of tidal and fluvial flooding. This will help reduce the cost of flooding infrastructure on the town centre car park site.

The Council will work with Western Power Distribution (WPD) to ensure that the WPD land within the town centre car park can form part of a comprehensive regeneration project.

The Council will work with the owners of the 'church' land, between Market Street and Union Lane, to assess the potential of a comprehensive regeneration scheme.

Following the production of a viable development proposal, the Council will seek to deliver a mixed use development of the site. This is likely to be dependent upon securing pre-lets, for example from hotel and retail operators, and use of innovative development and/or delivery mechanisms to secure a successful scheme, as quickly as possible.

Additional car parking, in excess of the number of spaces currently on site, will be required to serve the town centre and, potentially, to enable (if required) delivery of other development proposals, such as at Oxen Cove and Freshwater Quarry, and to ensure revenue income to the Council.

4.7 Victoria Centre, Paignton

Summary

Various options are being considered for this site, which includes the two existing car parks and Lidl foodstore. The options being tested include:

- Comprehensive redevelopment, including demolition of existing car parks, construction of up to 200 apartments and a new surface level car park.
- Partial redevelopment, which includes space for food retail (30,000 square feet; 130 parking spaces) and apartments.

- Refurbishment of the ‘newer’ of the two car parks, to ensure the car park is safe, attractive and well used, which in turn reduces annual costs to the Council and increases income.
- Retention of the newer of the two car parks and re-use of the older car park, for a range of different uses.
- Demolition of the older of the two car parks and its replacement with residential development.

The site is subject to a number of lease requirements, legal rights and constraints, making it more difficult to deliver a comprehensive redevelopment scheme – certainly in the short term – than other town centre regeneration sites.

Delivery Actions

The Council will continue to work with Lidl to establish its long term position for the site and, should Lidl wish to relocate, the Council will use its best endeavours to secure an alternative location within the town centre.

The Council will seek to acquire land that it considers necessary to deliver a comprehensive, viable and deliverable development scheme.

The Council will review leases and legal rights, to explore the potential to unlock the site.

On completion of the work to establish a business case for refurbishment of the newer of the two car parks at Victoria Square, the Council will consider the business case to decide whether it is prudent to invest in refurbishment of the car park. This will include consideration of improved signage / wayfinding to this and other key car parks in and around the town.

The Council will continue to work with Network Rail and GWR to establish whether car parking space at Victoria Centre can be used by rail passengers, to help unlock the potential of land owned by Network Rail at Paignton Station.

The Council will, as a first preference, seek to direct deliver a development on the site, subject to the production of a business case to support prudential borrowing.

The Council will continue to promote and market the site, working with investors and developers, to establish market interest either in a comprehensive redevelopment of the whole site or partial redevelopment, for example utilising the site of the older of the two car parks. If there is market interest, and the Council decides not to lead on development of the site, the Council will seek a development partnership arrangement with an investor/developer.

4.8 Crossways

Summary

A successful redevelopment or refurbishment outcome for Crossways remains one of the top regeneration priorities for the Council. Crossways is under-occupied, is suffering from a lack of investment and located on the edge of the central part of Paignton. Its successful re-use or redevelopment is important to the success of Paignton town centre.

The Council is working closely with the landowner and a development partner to bring forward a redevelopment proposal for the site. This could result in submission of a formal pre-planning application enquiry in early summer 2017 and a planning application by the end of summer 2017.

The Council should continue to support a private sector led solution for this site and, only if this fails, should the Council consider how it can use its powers to bring about redevelopment.

The significant costs associated with negotiated acquisition and redevelopment of the site, and the associated viability issues, do not support – at this time – the Council’s acquisition of Crossways. Notwithstanding the need to negotiate purchase, there is not yet a viable, deliverable development solution with a planning permission and developer in place to deliver it.

Delivery Actions

The Council continues to work with the land owner’s representatives and investors to enable successful redevelopment or refurbishment of the site.

The Council will continue to investigate viable, deliverable redevelopment and refurbishment options. If private sector solutions fail to materialise, then those options may come forward, subject to viability.

5 Townscape Investment Initiative

5.1 Introduction

There is a need for significant investment in, and improvement of, the physical fabric of the town centres. This is particularly the case for important elements of the streetscene, around key junctions for example, and key building frontages on high streets. This investment will be branded as the Townscape Investment Initiative.

The need for townscape investment has been very clearly demonstrated by:

- Feedback from the soft market testing work during which potential investors made it very clear that improvements in the physical appearance of the town centres was necessary before they would invest.
- Feedback from the sorts of high end, boutique or independent retailers not currently present in the town centres, who have also made it clear that, amongst other requirements, they are unlikely to take up space in the town centres until townscape investments are underway or completed.
- Responses to consultation on the Destination Management Plan, which make it clear that if Torbay is to attract more visitors, more investment and improve its tourism offer, there needs to be significant improvements to the townscape.
- Complaints from local residents, businesses and visitors about the appearance of the town centres, buildings and the streetscape.
- The economic benefits that other places, such as Blackpool, Bournemouth, Basingstoke, Bromley and Worcester, have seen as a result of townscape investment initiatives. It is difficult to show quantitative economic outcomes as a result of townscape investment, although a number of studies have been undertaken. However, it can be shown that townscape improvements, led by the public sector, have led to further private sector investment, reduced retail vacancy rates, increased footfall and better consumer experience.

Delivery of prioritised, targeted townscape improvements will be in accordance with Council policies including the Masterplans, the Urban Design Guide, the Local Plan, the Cultural Strategy and the Economic Strategy. Improvements would also be consistent with previous investment, such as that at Torquay Harbour.

5.2 Approach

A two pronged approach is proposed:

- Targeted investment in improved public realm, at key junctions / nodes on high streets
- Targeted investment in key building frontages along high streets.

The emphasis, for public realm improvements, is on the creation of shared space. This is space shared by public transport, cars, cyclists and pedestrians and is an approach that has and continues to work well in towns and cities across the country. It will include the removal of a lot of clutter, (including unnecessary signs), a reduction in vehicle speeds and a more consistent/harmonious use of materials. It will help provide more accessible and legible town centres, for all forms of transport; it will increase footfall and time spent by people in town centres.

The improvement of key building frontages will bring about substantial improvement to the appearance of the town centre. It will increase investor confidence in the towns and improve consumer and visitor experience.

The Council has a limited amount of resource to commit to townscape improvements. It must use this resource wisely, focusing on those projects that will have most impact on town centre regeneration. It also needs to work with landowners, and to share costs, to get the best returns on investment

In terms of public realm improvements the likely focus for investment follows the adopted Torquay and Paignton Town Centre Masterplans.

In Torquay, a targeted approach will result in improvements to:

- Castle Circus
- GPO roundabout
- Cary Parade/The Strand
- Market Street junction with Union Street
- The area between the former BHS store and Union Square

In Paignton, a targeted approach will result in improvements to:

- Station Square and the area between Victoria Street/Torbay Road
- The junction of Palace Avenue, Totnes Road and Victoria Street

These prioritised public realm improvements are shown in red on the plans on pages 4 and 5 of this Strategy.

In terms of building frontage improvements, there will be a focus on key buildings (i.e. those that are most visible and have the potential to contribute most to a high quality street scene). It is likely to include buildings that have historic and/or architectural value and those that are showing signs of significant neglect. It could also include groups of buildings, which together add value to the street scene and include features (such as canopies) that, if repaired, would significantly improve the street scene.

5.3 Timing

It is important that investment in townscape improvements occurs early in the regeneration programme, to help build investor, visitor and consumer confidence in the town centres. However, given the time it takes to plan and deliver public realm enhancements, the townscape investment initiative needs to progress quickly.

5.4 Town Centre Regeneration Fund

The Council will seek to establish a Town Centre Regeneration Fund to meet the capital and revenue costs associated with the delivery of the Townscape Investment Initiative and, if funds allow, to pump-prime less viable sites.

Any revenue surplus generated from the Town Centres Regeneration Programme be earmarked to the Town Centre Investment Fund. In addition, as full business cases are developed as part of the Townscape Investment Initiative, consideration will be given as to whether other sources of capital funding can be prioritised to deliver the schemes.