



Torquay - Town Investment Plan

July 2020

Torbay
naturally inspiring

Torquay is one of 101 towns invited to develop innovative regeneration plans that will help to build a prosperous future for the town. Torquay will receive a significant investment of £21.9 million from the Government's Towns Fund.

A Town Board was created to oversee the production of this Town Investment Plan (TIP). The Investment Plan was submitted to Government in July and is the basis for a Town Deal which allows development of the detailed business cases for the projects to bring transformational investment into Torquay.

The Investment Plan has evolved from the vision for Torquay, shared by the Town Board and representatives across Torbay's community, including the Neighbourhood Plan Forum, the Community Development Trust, and Torbay Town Partnership. The approved Neighbourhood Plan has shaped many aspects of the Investment Plan which is intended to deliver outcomes which include:

- Additional private and other public sector investment
- More business start-ups, business success and young entrepreneurs
- New jobs
- Increasing the number of people living in the town centre
- An improved cultural and tourism offer
- Improved health outcomes
- Reduced town centre antisocial behaviour
- Less benefit dependency, inequality and disadvantage

The Town Investment Plan focuses on these key areas:

- Delivering a more vibrant town centre through the redevelopment of key town centre sites for mixed uses and public realm schemes
- Improving connectivity to and in Torquay through the delivery of a new rail station at Edginswell and improving connections between the main station and town centre

These areas have been chosen for their impact in the short and medium term and ability to be brought forward at pace. The Plan also identifies complementary proposals for investment in tourism and cultural projects to improve the quality of Torquay's offer; investment in delivering employment sites; and improvements to connectivity.

The Town Investment Plan includes proposals for accelerated projects to improve parks and public space.

The estimated development cost of the projects in the Town Investment Plan is £135 million.

Challenges

Torquay is a town of approximately 67,000 people and the largest of the three towns that collectively form Torbay. Torquay has the lowest GVA per head in England.

Some of the significant challenges are:

- Deprivation and anti-social behaviour – Ten out of the 43 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) ranked in the bottom 10% of most deprived areas in England.
- Employment land and premises – The most recent Torbay Employment Land Review, undertaken in 2013¹, showed that the development of employment space in Torbay is constrained by significant abnormal costs due to the ground conditions or topography. This is also true in Torquay where all of the strategic employment sites present challenges due to their previous uses and topography.
- Employment and skills – Torbay has strengths across the Health & Social Care, Hi-Tech, Tourism and Fishing industries. The majority of key businesses within the Hi-Tech sector are located in either Paignton or Brixham, the main exception being Gooch & Housego² which is located in Torquay.
- Torquay's business demography is heavily concentrated in the service sector, primarily in the Health & Social Care, Retail, and Hospitality sectors.
- Skills among the working age population residents in Torquay are lower than the Torbay, Heart of the South West (HotSW), and UK averages.
- Transport – Effective transport links play a critical role in stimulating the local economy by providing fast and sustainable transport links to the wider area. The Torquay Gateway (Edginswell and the wider Willows area) is currently facing congestion and car parking capacity issues. The future growth of this area, the proposed investment at Torbay Hospital and the connectivity with the town centre require that these challenges are addressed.
- Housing –Torquay is suffering from a shortage of affordable housing with 550 households on the housing waiting list and 251 in temporary accommodation.
- Impact of Covid-19 – Oxford Economics has modelled the impact of Covid-19 on the local economy³. The baseline forecast shows that the Torbay economy will suffer a severe recession in 2020 with the loss of 2,600 jobs. The Torbay economy will recover to pre-crisis levels by 2023 in GVA and 2022 in terms of jobs – lagging the South West and UK average (2022 for GVA and jobs). The baseline forecast is that GVA growth will average just 0.6% per year between 2020 to 2025 - weaker than the rate across the South West (1.0%) and the UK (1.2%).

¹ Peter Brett (2013) Torbay Employment Land Review

² A global leader in photonics

³ Oxford Economic (2020) Coronavirus: Economic Impact Scenarios for Torbay: A Report for SW Councils

Torquay's Assets, Strengths and Opportunities

Whilst the town faces significant challenges it also has assets and strengths upon which to build:

- Heritage and environment – Torquay lies in a naturally inspiring coastal setting, and the area has been designated a UNESCO Geopark.
- Tourism – Torquay is at the heart of one of England's premier coastal resorts with national and international recognition as a tourist destination. A 2017 report⁴ found that the area sees 640,000 staying visitors and 1.7 million day visitors. Total visitor spend is estimated at £242 million which supports approximately 6,000 jobs.
- Education – Within Torquay there is access to good quality education at both primary and secondary school level.
- Health & Social Care – As Torquay's largest employer, the Torbay Hospital improvement programme provides a significant opportunity for the residents of Torquay. Job posting data from both before and after the Covid-19 lockdown, shows that there has been an increase in the demand for skills in the Health & Social Care sector, and that demand remains for common skills. Linking these opportunities with education and developing progression pathways is part of the local post Covid-19 recovery.
- Digital connectivity – Super-fast broadband has been rolled-out giving the area an advantage over a number of other areas in HotSW that suffer from a lack of reliable broadband. The availability of high quality digital connectivity across the town means that remote working has been a viable option during the current Covid-19 pandemic. This provides Torquay the opportunity to attract businesses to relocate and thrive allowing people to have a flexible work/life balance whilst still being able to connect with costumers and markets.
- Recent Investments - The area has benefited from recent investments including:
 - THAT Group is nearing completion of a £32M mixed-use development at Torwood Street in Torquay town centre
 - Harbour View, a 120 bed Premier Inn, is under construction and due to open in early 2022
 - Fragrance Group has acquired two sites in Torquay for hotel development, including the site of the Palace Hotel, which is intended to be brought forward as a 5-star resort hotel

These investments demonstrate there is emerging market confidence which can be given real momentum by the schemes proposed in this plan. Doing so will support the economy to recover more quickly, provide a platform for transformative economic change and ultimately a repositioning of Torquay's economy.

⁴ The South West Research Company (2017) Torquay Tourism Summary 2017

Focus of the Town Investment Plan

There has been considerable engagement with the community over recent years to develop the Neighbourhood Plan, Town Centre and Torquay Gateway Masterplans and the Council's Town Centre Transformation strategy.

These community-led plans sit at the heart of this Plan.

Torquay has for some years struggled to define its role within the region. However, the extensive engagement of partners in the town and across the wider area over the last 18 months has led to consensus about the urgent need for the town to capitalise on its strengths and in doing so provide new infrastructure, create new jobs and encourage both business growth and attract new businesses to the area. We are determined that Torquay will achieve its economic potential and play a distinctive role within the regional and national economy.

To address the challenges and maximise the opportunities for Torquay we are seeking support for:

- Catalysing town centre transformation. Investing in improving the public realm, commercial, residential and service offer will accelerate recovery and crucially make the town centre a better place, with more people living and working there.
- Enhancing connectivity for people to access the town and the town centre in a more coherent way. Investment in a new rail station at Edginswell, which will enable significant development of the hospital, new housing and employment land in a sustainable way. Investment in coastal corridor will connect Torquay rail station with the town centre to encourage increased use of the town centre.

The complementary interventions will be delivered with funds from sources which we expect to include the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Arts Council (Creative People & Place, Cultural Destinations), UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Coastal Communities Fund, local investment and the private sector.

Torquay offers highly competitive rent and salary costs, access to labour and an enviable lifestyle to support relocation. The centre of Torquay can be reached in 15 minutes' walk from the existing rail stations, and the

Strategy

Vision

Our vision for 2030 is that:

Torquay is the heart of the English Riviera. A grand, elegant town with a rich history linked to its naturally inspiring coastal, maritime and landscape setting, with a high quality and vibrant town centre. This unique setting provides one of the best places to live, work and play in the South West. Connections to London have improved and further enhancements, particularly rail, allow Torquay to be more accessible to investors and visitors from within and outside the town. High quality tourism is one of the leading sectors with an international reputation, and the town is thriving after the Coronavirus crisis. Torquay has a high value health

and social care economy linked to the Torbay Hospital improvement programme, and the wider offer of Torbay's advanced electronics and photonics sector is enhanced by the skills and space on offer in Torquay. Torquay has a thriving business community providing well-paid, high quality employment in a broad range of sectors.

Objectives

The objectives along with the proposed target for each are summarised below.

Challenge	Objective	Measure	Target
Poor quality town centre urban realm and environment	A high quality, vibrant town centre (VTC)	Additional private and other public sector investment	Total investment of at least £95 million in the town
Potential for repositioning & improving Torquay's visitor offer		Increased vitality, visitors and footfall in the town centre	Additional visitors Additional footfall
		An improved cultural and tourism offer	new cultural and tourism facilities
		New homes particularly in the town centre	200 new homes in the town centre
		Reduced town centre antisocial behaviour	Fewer incidents reported per year
Poor rail connectivity	A better connected and more accessible place (BCP)	Better connectivity and reduced severance	Additional trips by public transport
Potential for greater public transport use			
Overcoming barriers to the delivery of employment sites	A high quality economy (HQE)	New jobs	New jobs in the town
Repositioning Torquay for higher value employment		More business start-ups, business success and young entrepreneurs	New startup businesses per year
		A better skilled workforce	Higher % of residents with NVQ 3 and 4
		Stronger key sectors (Tourism, Health & Social Care, Electronics and Photonics)	Additional jobs/businesses/GVA in the key sectors
		A more inclusive economy	Lower benefit claimant count IMD reductions

The Local Plan targets 825 homes and between 700 and 1,400 jobs in central Torquay. New housing in the town centre will contribute at least 200 new homes; and investment in employment space will support job growth.

We intend that capital investment will promote and enhance sustainable and inclusive growth. We will ensure that energy efficiency and generation opportunities are built in and contribute to clean growth and the locally declared climate emergency. The adoption of the community wealth building approach as part of Torbay's Covid-19 response will be critical to increasing the number of opportunities flowing from this investment for local procurement and employment. Partners will work at pace to put in place a supply chain development process to support this.

We also want to use the investment to make Torquay better connected with real time information being shared between rail, bus and pedestrians to make journeys as seamless as possible.

We will embed these principles in the detailed development of the TIP projects, they will be;

- Inclusive – we will use the Town Deal to derive as much local economic benefit as possible in line with the community wealth building approach adopted by Torbay Council and its partners. This will be embedded in contracts where we will look at all times to maximise local employment, training and supply chain opportunities.
- Smarter – we will increase the amount of data captured in the town to inform the Council and partners of how space is being used, how it can be improved and managed better, be better connected and how data can be used to help users of these spaces
- Sustainable – Torbay has declared a climate emergency and the Council, with its partners across the community, is committed to leading by example and working to identify ways to make Torbay carbon neutral by 2030 and develop a Torbay Climate Emergency Action Plan.

Town Board

The Town Board will be the vehicle through which the vision and strategy for the town is defined. It will produce the TIP and inform the Town Deal, including the amount of investment secured through the Towns Fund.

The role of the Board is to:

- Develop and agree an evidence based Town Investment Plan
- Develop a clear programme of interventions
- Coordinate resources and influence stakeholders

The Town Board works with a Community Board, comprised of a representative from each of the community partnerships⁵, and a representative of the Torquay Neighbourhood Plan Forum and the Community Development Trust. The purpose of the Community Board is to continue to connect with these groups so that issues can be identified and views sought. The creation of the community board has formalised the way in which the community groups can engage and influence the Town Investment Plan and provides a

⁵ <https://www.torbaycdt.org.uk/community-partnerships/>

stronger basis to deal with the issues generated by regeneration programmes and ensure ongoing engagement. This approach is raising the quality of community engagement and while not without challenge has already allowed important issues such to be discussed.

The community board will continue to advise the Town Board and will be important in shaping the projects in this plan as those projects reach milestones such as around planning applications. It is likely that there will be diverse views about the merits and risks of some projects and the community board is perfectly placed to help facilitate engagement on this programme.

The community is giving the Council and community leaders clear indication to speed up delivery. While the detailed approach will be refined, we want to test with the community that the projects and priorities remain the same and work to get the best local benefit from what is delivered.

Business Support

The following local businesses and investors are part of the [Town Board](#):

- Torbay Business Forum
- TDA
- Torbay Leisure Hotels
- Torbay Hi Tech Cluster
- English Riviera Tourism Co

Torbay Business Forum is an umbrella body for businesses and business representative organisations across Torbay. It brings together small and large businesses together with local anchor organisations to help share information, challenge decision makers and influence the development of strategies and plans.

TDA is Torbay Council's wholly owned economic development company. TDA works with Torbay Council, investors, local businesses and other stakeholders to develop and implement relevant plans for the area including the Economic Strategy and Destination Management Plan. TDA has a private sector led board bringing broader involvement to these plans.

Torbay Leisure Hotels and the Hi Tech Cluster operate in sectors which are of real importance to the local economies and where senior leaders within the businesses are engaged with partners locally to help develop their sectors.