

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL**

**25<sup>th</sup> MAY 2021**

**BRIEFING NOTE**

**OPERATION LONDON BRIDGE**

**1. BACKGROUND**

Operation London Bridge is the named given to the plan which will be instigated when it is officially announced that The Queen has died. Planning for this started in 1960.

Some other senior members of the Royal Family also have plans in place i.e.;

- HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh – Operation Forth Bridge (planning started in 1960) which was recently put into place following the Duke's death;
- HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales – Operation Menai Bridge (planning started in 1968)

There is also a separate plan should The Queen die at either Balmoral or Sandringham, due to the extended timings in returning The Queen to London. This is Operation Unicorn.

Operation London Bridge was historically reviewed every 5 years, it is now reviewed quarterly.

There are very strict protocols to be followed across the country in the period between the announcement of the death and the day following the funeral.

As you may be aware, there are various types of funeral;

- i. State Funeral – this is for the Monarch and for anyone the Monarch grants one to i.e. Lord Mountbatten and Winston Churchill;
- ii. Ceremonial Royal Funeral – as for Diana, Princess of Wales;
- iii. Non-ceremonial Royal Funeral – as for HRH Duke of Windsor;
- iv. Ceremonial State Funeral – as for Margaret Thatcher
- v. Military Funeral – this is the option Prince Philip had chosen for himself, and which took place at Windsor Castle

Had The Queen and Prince Philip died at the same time, there would have been two separate funerals.

The purpose of this Briefing Note is to make all Members aware of the protocols they as Members of the Council and the Council itself, need to follow as well as

ensuring all staff are aware of the part they will need to play to ensure Tavistock is seen as meeting the requirements of the plan, and having marked the passing of The Queen in an appropriate and dignified way.

## **2. THE CURRENT SITUATION**

I have attended various training sessions and webinars, as well as liaising with Officers at West Devon Borough Council with regard how the two authorities will work together to deliver the various parts of the plan.

I have also spoken to St Eustachius' Church, which has confirmed it has the necessary information with regard the Service to be delivered on the Sunday within the mourning period, and prior to the funeral.

Some elements of the plan will be undertaken by West Devon Borough Council, whilst some matters can be undertaken by the Town Council on behalf of the local residents.

I have also written a detailed plan, which, in summary, includes;

- a timetable for the flying of the Union Flag from the Town Hall, as detailed within the national plan, between the day the death is announced and the day after the funeral. The funeral will take place 10 days after the date of death, unless this falls on a Sunday when it will take place on the Monday. If the funeral falls on a week day, this will be a Public Holiday. As mentioned above, if the death takes place in either Scotland or at Sandringham, the timings will differ slightly to allow for travel;
- updating the Council's website with appropriate photographs and wording (including a message from the Mayor), and also providing information such as timings of Church Services in the town, where flowers can be laid by members of the public and the rules around this (i.e. no teddy bears or similar/no cellophane or ribbons around the flowers, how to donate to one of the charities the deceased is Patron of in lieu of flowers, if desired);
- it is assumed that the Council would (Covid permitting) intend to have a Book of Condolence (for HRH The Duke of Edinburgh most Councils signposted to the on-line Book set up by Buckingham Palace). The plan therefore addresses;
  - where the Book will be located, it is to be available between 9.00am – 7.30pm for the 9 days between D+1 and the day before the funeral;
  - a member of staff would need to be present at all times the Book is available for signing;
  - a link will also be provided on the Council's website to the online Book of Condolence which will be on the Buckingham Palace website, for those who wish to sign but are physically unable to

attend the local site in person or wish to pay their respects virtually;

- a framed official photograph of the deceased, in a black frame, will be placed alongside the Book of Condolence, together with a small vase of appropriate flowers;
- where/when the local Proclamation will be made, and who should be invited to attend. This might be;
  - at Kilworthy Park (hosted by West Devon Borough Council), when they will decide who to invite, although it is anticipated they will invite local Mayors and dignitaries such as the local Deputy Lieutenant of Devon. There will be a County proclamation in Exeter

Subject to the County and Borough events the Town Council may also decide to hold their own event, later the same day.

I have also obtained;

- a copy of the official photograph to be placed next to the Book of Condolence, with appropriate ribbons and photo frame;
- a Book of Condolence;
- black armbands to be worn by public-facing Council staff, during the mourning period

Other matters requiring consideration, either now or at the time;

- if local, planned events should be cancelled if it is possible to do so if it is felt it is inappropriate to carry on with them during the Lying in State period (mourning), such as Goose Fair, events in the Town Hall etc. No events should proceed if they might be considered as disrespectful or inappropriate, in the circumstances;
- covering the floodlights in the Churchyard with purple filters, if this is not possible then they should be switched off until the day after the funeral has taken place;
- if the death occurs during any COVID lockdown period, all activities will be scaled back but the major events will still take place but in an appropriate way;
  - National and County Proclamations would still proceed however local ones may not take place, to ensure social distancing;
  - the lowering and raising of flags would continue in the same format as previously agreed, as if not in lockdown;
  - laying of flowers would still continue, but this would need to be managed in a socially-distanced way;
  - the signing of the physical Book of Condolence would still continue, but again would need to be managed in a COVID secure way;
  - the funeral would be held in a lesser format;

- subject to availability, and circumstances, whether the Council may televise the funeral on a large screen, perhaps in Butchers' Hall, where there is already a large screen TV and the level access will make it possible for elderly/disabled people to safely and easily enter and leave;
- it is expected that the Coronation of the next Monarch would take place 6-9 months after the funeral, therefore a budget would need to be identified for this for any events the Council might wish to deliver as a celebration at that time. The period in which the new Monarch takes over, is known as Operation Spring Tide.

Other matters requiring action at the appropriate time;

- for a statement to be drafted by/on behalf of the Mayor to be placed on the website at the point it is updated with photographs, additional information with regard flower laying, Church Services, Book of Condolence etc. This is not to be an obituary but a short message conveying the sadness of the local residents on the death of the person;
- a letter to be drafted to be sent from the Mayor to Buckingham Palace addressed to the Private Secretary of the deceased, or the new Monarch's Private Secretary, as appropriate

### **3. CONCLUSION**

It is important that as soon as the death is announced;

- all plans are initiated immediately in accordance with the very strict timetable, as there may be very little notice;
- all Councillors to ensure they have appropriate wear available, especially if they plan to attend any local Proclamation i.e. dark suit/black tie/black armband/black hat;
- that Councillors are aware that they should keep a low profile during the mourning period i.e. not having their photo or a presence in the local press or on social media at any event which might be perceived as either political or frivolous;
- if the Mayor is attending an event, which is considered appropriate to continue in this period (i.e. visiting a care home or school), and if wearing the full Regalia, that the medallion is either covered in black ribbon or enclosed within a small black bag.

After the funeral;

- on the day following the funeral all flowers must be removed by 9am, and composted;
- the Union Flag on the Town Hall to either return to full mast, or be removed entirely;
- a letter to be sent to the new Monarch's Private Secretary advising them that a Book of Condolence was available in Tavistock (subject to the

recommendation below), and how many signatures it contains. The Book remains with the Council archives, and in due course will be sent to the Devon Records Office, it is not sent to Buckingham Palace;

- after a suitable period, a commemorative tree to be planted;
- plans should start to be put in place for a celebration of the Coronation, which will follow in 6-9 months. A budget will also need to be allocated for this.

Recommendation

- a) The Committee and Council endorse the above arrangements;
- b) The Committee and Council confirm that a physical Book of Condolence be provided.

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**Tavistock Town Council**