

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
26th APRIL, 2021
POLICY & PRIORITIES 2021-23**

A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide an opportunity to consider potential priority areas for delivery within the remaining Council term (to May 2023) consistent with organisational capacity and resources following the impact of Coronavirus. As such this report is pursuant to the recent Member Workshop and preparatory to more detailed work that will be needed regarding projects or programmes of work agreed, in principle, to proceed.

B. CORPORATE POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The effective management of resources and appropriate forward planning underpin the delivery of the Council's Strategic Plan and support its commitment to value for money, the promotion of best value and continuous organisational improvement. The Council's Strategic Plan comes to term in 2021, however in view of the subject of this report potentially all elements of the current Strategic Plan are engaged. It is also anticipated that the Strategic Plan will be subject to review in the current year.

C. LEGAL AND RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

In view of the nature of the topics currently under consideration legal and risk management issues principally relate to:

- a) Statutory compliance (including anticipated changes in the statutory framework e.g. as regards planning);
- b) Acting consistent with available capacity/resources;
- c) Reputation and expectation management;
- d) The availability and willingness of appropriate anchor partners to support collective projects;
- e) The potential for further impacts arising from the pandemic and its consequences.

In the circumstances the overriding priority for the Council will necessarily continue to be the maintenance of a prudent approach to, and rigorous oversight of, the management of scarce resources, most especially the bringing of reserves to acceptable levels alongside supporting the community through/past the pandemic.

D. RESOURCE ISSUES

The resource issues associated with this report are as set out in the attachments and previous reports (and in part indicated in the section above). They principally comprise, but are not limited to:

- Funding – the available revenue budget is £20,000 for locality based activities;
- Capacity - organisational capacity – requirements of extant initiatives staffing numbers, work backlog and the availability of relevant skills sets.

E. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Where work streams are adopted environmental issues will be assessed at the applicable stages post initiation. As such all areas of spend are subject to review and recommendation at the time of resource allocation through the corporate reporting framework.

F. COMMUNICATION ISSUES

The content of this report has been derived from the outcome of Member Workshops.

G. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Tavistock Town Council review, endorse and adopt the recommendations as set out in para’s 2.3, 2.13 and 2.15 of the report.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Tavistock Town Council has dedicated extensive effort, over several years now, to delivering substantial and ambitious projects seeking to support the local economy, regenerate and enhance the Town Centre and make Tavistock a better place to live, work and visit.

1.2 These have principally taken the form of:

- a) Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) – a multi project programme of works extending over several years providing variously:
 - i) grants to private commercial landlords to repair and restore historic commercial buildings and thereby safeguard and enhance the commercial offer of the Town;
 - ii) grants to repair and restore critical buildings within the Town and thereby safeguard and enhance the commercial offer of the Town through supporting those buildings central to its character;
 - iii) improving and enhancing key areas of the public realm, creating more pedestrian and leisure friendly spaces, reducing vehicular impacts, reducing street clutter and improving the vista of associated listed buildings;
 - iv) Providing education, interpretation and skills training opportunities.

It is understood your Council remains the only local Council in the Country to have successfully delivered a THI Scheme of any kind, least of all such a challenging scheme – the value of which

approximates to £2.2m (scheme itself), together with an estimated £500,000 additional investment. The Scheme officially ended on 31st March, 2021 (albeit ongoing responsibilities continue) and the Evaluation Report can be viewed on [The Tavistock Town Council Website](#)

- b) The Guildhall World Heritage Site Gateway and Visitor Information Centre. This is another major multi-year project of similar financial value to the THI intended to:
- Promote the Town as a destination and as an Eastern Gateway to the Cornwall & West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site (WHS) for local, national and international visitors thereby supporting regeneration and renewal;
 - Provide visitor information about the Town and surrounding areas (such as the Tamar Valley AONB, Dartmoor National Park etc.);
 - Provide facilities for Council and other public/voluntary sector peripatetic working with the community;
 - Protect and restore an iconic historic public building in public use, provide a base for activities and interpretation, both of the WHS and heritage (as well as a 'venue') in the locality.

Although the capital works are scheduled to conclude in late spring/early summer, followed by fit out and (subject to Coronavirus) soft opening likely mid/late summer development of the necessary working arrangements and related practices with your anchor partner are anticipated to last the year. Formal opening is expected in 2022.

- c) In 2019 (pre Coronavirus) the Council extensively reviewed areas that might form future work streams (pending the above) and identified, in particular areas such as sustainability and the environment and communications for future consideration. Following the impact of (and delays caused by) Coronavirus a similar exercise was undertaken in March this year which identified (alongside the existing policy commitments and to rebuilding reserves to acceptable/safe levels) the following three prospective areas to further consider whether (and if so how) to proceed. They are as follows:
- Supporting the Town through and beyond Coronavirus;
 - A Neighbourhood Development Plan;
 - Public Conveniences.

The next section of this report sets out the position in connection with each one of these topics, work to date, in hand and potential next steps.

More generally the Council will be aware both of the financially challenging situation it faces (drawing on the General Reserve in both the 2020-21 and 2021-22 financial years – further drawings not being sustainable) and its reduced operation at (currently) 75% staffing capacity.

2. PROSPECTIVE FUTURE WORKSTREAMS

SUPPORTING THE TOWN THROUGH & BEYOND CORONAVIRUS

2.1 Throughout the Coronavirus emergency the Council has actively sought to deploy its resources to supporting both the wider community and stakeholders including through:

- Keeping essential services operating - such as burial ground, parks and open spaces and streetscape;
- Offered Town Council resources – staff, buildings and vehicles to support the Coronavirus emergency authorities;
- Led with the BID Co on the safe and managed ‘re-opening’ of the town centre on behalf of the Category 1 Emergency Responders including safe highway configuration, safety measures and high street ambassadors;
- Provided substantial financial relief to eligible commercial tenants of Council premises through affording 6 months deferred rent alongside suspension of relevant rent reviews and an offer of flexible payment terms to support distressed tenants;
- Reconfigured the Pannier Market offer to afford safe trading and shopping opportunities when permitted to be open by Government;
- Partnered with the BID Co through provision of premises for ‘click and collect’, also with BID Co and THT on a Christmas pastimes initiative at East End Stores;
- Undertaken extensive activity to support ‘essential’ trading during lockdowns including through use of Butchers Hall and outside areas;
- Delivered Christmas Lights and Trees of Lights to provide some semblance of ‘normality’ in abnormal times;
- Continued to partner with WDBC and BID Co on community confidence measures;
- Provided grants to organisations supporting vulnerable residents of the Town suffering increased hardship or distress caused by Coronavirus;
- Is planning (subject to safety guidelines) to deliver community events such as Goose Fair and artisan and seasonal markets

alongside other activities (such as the BID Co and Dickensian) supporting community cohesion.

2.2 Looking ahead it is suggested that whilst some of these were necessarily a response to the pandemic from the outset, many will continue to provide a basis for supporting the community for the remainder of this year and potentially beyond. Furthermore, it is anticipated that both Government and principal authority initiatives will provide opportunity to partner in new opportunities to support the community.

2.3 Accordingly, it is: -

RECOMMENDED THAT the Council

- i) continue to embed Coronavirus support measures within its day to day operations as/where appropriate and achievable;
- ii) request the Budget and Policy Committee consider and recommend whether, and if so how, the Council grant scheme for 2021-22 might best be deployed and if/how it should continue to be targeted at those suffering distress arising from Coronavirus;
- iii) indicate its support for the re-election of the Tavistock Business Improvement District Ltd recognising the contribution it has made to supporting the business community generally and, most recently, during Coronavirus;
- iv) Communicate to principal authority partners its willingness in principle to engage in partnerships/initiatives (such as the 'levelling up' or 'community renewal' programmes) targeted at supporting the community through/past Coronavirus and developing local resilience.

A NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2.4 The purpose of a Neighbourhood Development Plan, its potential benefits and drawbacks are well rehearsed and have been addressed in previous reports. The Council has previously registered a designation of the whole of the parish of Tavistock for a prospective Neighbourhood Development Plan and has been (most recently) awaiting a key dependency in the form of finalisation of the Conservation Area Management Plan and Appraisal by the Local Planning Authority.

2.5 For those seeking more detailed information on Neighbourhood Planning please refer the Good Councillors Guide to Neighbourhood Planning (circulated previously) or to:

[Locality Neighbourhood Website – Good Councillors Guide](#)

[The Government Website - Neighbourhood Planning](#)

[The Local Government Association - Neighbourhood Planning](#) (please note this document is written from a principal authority perspective)

2.6 However, following recent developments and discussion in the Council Chamber some additional points/clarification might be helpful in scoping next steps. In particular Council will be mindful of consultations by Government on proposed reforms to the Planning System (described by the Prime Minister as *'radical reform unlike anything we have seen since the Second World War. No more fiddling around the edges...a whole new planning system for England'*) including, in precis:

- Local Plans (i.e. the Joint Local Plan) to set out site and area specific development requirements as opposed to general policies for development and alongside design codes;
- National policies extending to cover areas such as design, energy efficiency etc, with the NPPF becoming the 'primary source of policies for development management',
- Local Plans including growth, renewal or protected zones of land indicating, in principle, presumptions ranging from in favour of development to strong presumptions against development;
- Principal authorities having 30 months to produce new local plans;
- Provision for locally produced design codes more binding on Council decisions;
- A presumption that new development should produce a net gain to the appearance of an area (in place of a neutral impact presumption);
- Potential for the modification through local plans of permitted development;
- Neighbourhood Development Plans to be retained and reformed as an 'important means of community input' (the nature of such reform is not yet clear);
- A new national infrastructure levy to replace existing s106 Agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy;
- A potential change in emphasis within the planning system toward design codes as the actual principle of development becomes clearer under the measures outlined above;

2.7 The foregoing represent a perceived move from the current system which is sometimes viewed as 'reactive' to planning applications, to one where the principle of development is established in advance by

local plans and design codes alongside 'streamlining' and faster determination of applications themselves.

- 2.8 Government has indicated its intent to respond to the findings of the consultation in the 'spring'. Alongside the foregoing there is some recognition that changes (not yet advised) will need to be made to the enforcement system, more constraints applied to 'innovative' homes in the countryside and anticipated restrictions in respect of Article 4 directions and greater protection for statues/monuments.
- 2.9 A new Model Design Code is also expected which will sit above local design codes. It is not yet clear whether there is an expectation local design codes will be local planning authority led, NDP led, or both. It is also unclear under the prospective new arrangements what weight may/not be given to NDP's already adopted under the currently applicable system.
- 2.10 More generally a NDP is typically the product of several years' work. It is therefore important that:
- a) In embarking on a NDP, and notwithstanding the significant commitment to community involvement, the Council is clear in advance on any content it considers essential to delivery of a successful outcome;
 - b) The Council makes appropriate resources available to deliver the plan and deploys those resources in a disciplined way. The proven operating model being to buy in resources that cannot be sourced from volunteers – such as independent facilitation, project management, consultation, administration and technical expertise.
 - c) The experience of other comparable authorities suggests a reasonable overall cost estimate of £60,000-£85,000 (recognising that delivery is typically over several years, there is a basic grant available of up to £10,000 together with potential additional support of up to an extra £8,000 for specified technical support where applicable).
 - d) There is a group of (ideally 4-6) councillors willing and able to dedicate substantial time and skills to supporting the plan process over a period of (typically 2½ -6) years. Unlike normal Council business this is less about reading reports and attending meetings than active participation in the administration, organisation, consultation on and development of the NDP.
- 2.11 It may therefore be that in the circumstances two principal questions arise in connection with this topic. Firstly, does the Council wish to undertake a NDP and, if the answer is in the affirmative, then

secondly how best to proceed in light of the implications arising from changes under way to the planning system nationally.

2.12 There will then be opportunity at the next stage to consider in more detail future steps such as how a NDP working/steering group could be configured, what sum to be allocated from the available budget (localism), services to be procured, which organ of the Council to report to, consultation/engagement arrangements etc.

2.13 Accordingly, to move the matter forward and more fully address the position it is: -

RECOMMENDED THAT the Council request the Development Management and Licensing Committee, in its capacity as organisational lead body for planning, development and the built environment, to:

- i) Consider the position with regard to whether to proceed with a NDP at the present time and make a recommendation to Council in principle accordingly;
- ii) In the event the answer is in the affirmative, the Committee to meet with WDBC Strategic Planning Officers to review the extant planning policy framework in the round (national and local and the implications of the mooted Government changes to planning), then to make further recommendation(s) to Council as to
 - a. how best and when to proceed in view of the current position in respect of changes to the planning framework nationally;
 - b. identify those critical planning areas that the Committee considers essential a meaningful NDP* should address (ie those areas where the existing superior plans are inadequate or insufficient and/or where a NDP could appropriately add value through measures 'in conformity' with superior plans).

Note

- item (b) reflects the advice received at the session delivered to Council in 2020 by Mr S Besford-Foster regarding the importance attached to being clear from the outset as to whether a NDP is needed, and where it is, the planning issues it needs to address (as a minimum) so as to succeed (and avoid the challenges plans in areas such as Totnes have encountered).
- the Local Planning Authority (LPA) have been requested to advise of any changes to their policy framework envisaged as regards more

locally focussed planning policies or codes as well as the current position (in light of Government consultations) regarding the Joint Local Plan. Clearly close collaboration with the LPA has the potential to improve efficiency, avoid duplication/wasted effort and enhance complementary output. The Strategic Planning Manager of Plymouth City Council has accordingly advised: -

'The JLP is adopted and does not need to be reviewed until 2024, but plan making is a continuous cycle of monitoring and delivery. It is very important to understand Tavistock, how it is functioning, what changes have occurred, what its future is likely to be and to build up an evidence base and strategy for the town, This is required partly because there are implications from the Governments changes to the use classes order and permitted development rights which will have an impact on town centres, retail, commercial and business units, but also to understand what is now needed, will help in any future design code and importantly to structure delivery strategies for the town. Any work about Tavistock, through the NDP or otherwise will be very useful to compliment and deliver the current JLP and will help in informing future policies going forward. We will certainly keep you informed of any programme to review the JLP'

- When the information provided above, item (ii)(a-b) refers the matter to then be brought back to Council in order that it can consider the administrative, organisational and procedural arrangements (such as steering group selection/composition, project plan, budget, evidence databases, consultation statement and reporting arrangements to/oversight by TTC) appropriate to best move forward.
- *by way of example this could be in relation to factors such as (but not limited to) allocation of sites, housing &/or employment provision, infrastructure/community and other uses etc. In doing so the Committee will be mindful that a NDP is distinct from, albeit appropriately informed by, a wider Town Plan on the one hand or indeed the Town Councils own Strategic Plan on the other - which may share dependencies and overlap but remain distinct. The Committee will also be aware of core past commitments, in particular to seek to secure designation of new cemetery land through any NDP and the continuation of a viable livestock market.

PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

2.14 This is an area where the resources of the Council are already in deployment. Following discussions previously with the Borough Council the Town Council:

- a) has agreed an annual contribution to the operation of the Bus Station Toilets;

- b) is mobilising with a view to taking on responsibility for the operation of the Guildhall Car Park toilets later this year, most likely to coincide with the Government's Roadmap for the lifting of Coronavirus restrictions. This is expected to add in the order of £30,000pa to the cost base of the Council. A report will be brought to a future meeting setting out the detail of the proposed operating arrangements as/when they become available.

2.15 More generally it is understood that the Borough Council are looking at options for a good quality and financially sustainable approach to public toilet provision going forward to which end it is: -

RECOMMENDED THAT the Council

- a) endorse, in principle:
 - i. the continuation of existing arrangements to provide financial support for the Bus Station Toilets;
 - ii. the continuation of arrangements previously agreed to take on the operation of the Guildhall Car Park Toilets at the appropriate time;
- b) liaise with the Borough Council regarding how best the two organisations can work together to support good quality and financially sustainable public conveniences for the Town.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 As outlined above the Council is advanced in two of the three priority activities it has identified going forward – town renewal during/after Coronavirus and support for/provision of public conveniences. In both these cases, whilst continuing to work with the Borough Council around future options, work is substantially being 'mainstreamed' into the operational activities of the organisation.
- 3.2 Progress with a Neighbourhood Development Plan is somewhat more in the developmental stage. However, in light of the planning changes being consulted on by Government that may be to the Council's advantage insofar as it provides opportunity, should the Council wish to proceed, to align progress with the revisions to the Local Plan anticipated to be required of the LPA.
- 3.3 What all three work streams demonstrate is an increasing reliance on partnerships to deliver positive community outcomes, most especially with the Borough Council, and the associated importance of building and sustaining long term relationships/partnerships founded on mutual trust and understanding. It can therefore be

anticipated that significant political and organisational effort will be required in building back, and then sustaining, inter-authority collaboration.

3.4 The instructions of Council are sought.

**CARL HEARN
TOWN CLERK
TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
APRIL 2021**