Torquay Neighbourhood Plan:
Torquay Town Centre Community Partnership and Town Centre Focus Group
Brief History

Compared to many of Britain's towns, Torquay Town Centre is relatively modern. Its rapid growth in the nineteenth century was due to the Napoleonic Wars which prevented Britain's affluent from travelling abroad. The town became popular as it was already known by the wives and relatives of officers of the Channel Fleet, and the Bay's mild winter climate attracted many visitors who came for health reasons.

In the 1840's the age of the railway brought an era of prosperity and many homes and large hotels were built in Torquay. The town's character greatly benefited from then becoming a summer holiday resort. Indeed, by the late nineteenth century, Torquay was one of the richest towns in Britain. However, since the 1950s, tourist patterns have changed and the town centre is now faced with a range of social and economic challenges.

Today this area contains both quiet residential suburbs and a significant proportion of the major hotel accommodation in the resort, as well as being largest retail centre of Torbay. A large proportion of the area consists of open space. This includes coastline, parks, and recreation grounds, at the walled gardens of Torre Abbey, the rock-faced Royal Terrace Gardens and the private gardens and terraces of numerous hotels. Many of the major buildings are set against a backdrop of mature trees.

For more information on the history and nature of the area visit the links below

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Torquay

http://www.torbay.gov.uk/index/yourservices/planning/archaeologyandconservation/conservationareasappraisals.htm

Space for pictures/maps

Key Aims and Aspirations :

1. Improve the Town Centre retail, service and leisure experience to improve footfall and provide employment opportunities by:-

- Becoming the premier leisure destination both night and day
- Recreating a vibrant lively, colourful thriving Town centre with a range of activities for all age groups.
- Encouraging more people to live and work within the Town Centre
- Providing more eating and outside sitting areas.
- Encouraging sympathetic development providing the size and kind of premises which modern day High Street names consider attractive. Creating suitable premises for-small independent retailers and other uses such as gyms and cinemas.
- Providing adequate well maintained accessible and convenient parking facilities
- Creating better connectivity between Torre and the Waterfront.

Any developments must be of high quality and sympathetic to the area being redeveloped.

- More pedestrianisation would be welcomed for example along Fleet Walk which would mirror the course of the River Fleet and create q high quality public open or alternatively look to reinstate the tram lines.

2. Make more of the Town's heritage assets
3. Make provision for cyclists in and around the Town which would compliment cyclist tourism
4. Maintain Victorian facades where possible to keep the character of the Town.
5. Protect the green and open Public spaces.
6. Make access to public spaces easier for the disabled.(to be expanded by RM)
7. Relocate Job Centre and Magistrates Court to out of Town centre location. Thus making room for landmark retail store and unique indoor attraction to help revitalise this end of Town.
8. Protect and maintain our beaches – Torre Abbey Sands and Beacon Cove.
9. Protect the marine environment and develop a sustainable Maritime Economy

Housing, Economy, Retail and Leisure
Local Development Zones/Key Sites

Roebuck House	Pimlico
BT Exchange Building	The Strand
Old Post Office	Job Centre
Pavillion	Old Opera House
Former Laundry Site – Rock Road,	Hogs Head
Jeff Williams	Above shop premises
Night Clubs	Amusement Arcade (Cary Parade)
Shedden Hall	Conway Court
Torwood Street	Swan Street
Temperance Street	Job Centre
Castle Circus incorporating: Torquay Town Hall, Lymington Road Car Park, Torbay Magistrates Court, Torquay Library, Torquay Assembly Rooms / Electric House	Cinema in Abbey road

Any developments must be of high quality and sympathetic to the area being redeveloped.

Housing

Some of the above sites, we know have the support of the local communities for developments already proposed and the groups believe that it is important that the planning department when considering applications should engage with the local residents to ensure that their views are considered. At the same time, we are mindful that many of these sites sit within conservation areas and any development needs to take account of this. Thus any development should be sympathetic to its surrounding area whilst not being so restrictive that developers are deterred from making the investment and regenerating these sites identified above. We believe that some sites on the above list will more than meet housing requirement and negate the need for building on green field sites here or elsewhere in the Bay. We would support re-instatement of houses that have been sub divided into HMO's to encourage families back into the Town Centre. Housing around the Town centre is predominantly Victorian – consisting of large villas and terraced houses. Some large hotels have undergone conversion into high quality apartments particularly in the Shedden Hill end of Warren Rd and St Lukes area. This needs to be replicated in other areas where those businesses and hotels who want to apply a change of use where appropriate can do so provided that any conversions are of similar high quality – not low quality HMO's. Any new development should consider parking requirements and outside leisure space.

Commercial, Retail & Leisure (Zoning)

Retailing is in the throes of a revolution which has seen high streets up and down the country lose market share year on year. The results are there for all to see, empty shops, derelict buildings, shoppers getting into their cars to go out of town, or not going out at all but shopping online.
"High Streets and town centres that are fit for the 21st Century need to be multifunctional social centres, not simply competitors for stretched consumers. They must offer irresistible opportunities and experiences that do not exist elsewhere, are rooted in the interests and needs of local people, and will meet the demands of a rapidly changing world." Action for Market Towns, Twenty First Century Town Centres (2011).

The concept of 'healthy urban planning' is being promoted by the World Health Organisation to draw attention to the need for planners, public health professionals and others to work together to plan places that foster health and well-being.

Physical activity, especially walking, has many important health benefits for older adults and the built environment plays a crucial role in encouraging healthy activity for this growing segment of the population. Current UK estimates from the Office of National Statistics (ONS 2011) see the proportion of over 60s rising from 23% to 31% by 2058. Torbay already has an over 60s population which exceeds the 2058 ONS national estimates with 31.4% of its population currently over the age of 60 (2011 census) – placing Torbay 45 years ahead of the rest of the country.

Any developments must be of high quality and sympathetic to the area being redeveloped.

Torbay has the potential to act as a leading example of how the design of buildings and public spaces can facilitate beneficial activity for its aging population as well as improving the health of the wider community. The comprehensive review of Torquay Town Centre and planned growth within the Bay offers a unique opportunity to integrate design guidelines which encourage healthy behaviour and increase accessibility, not just for older adults, but for all residents and visitors no matter what age or ability.

Further reference: World Health Organisation Healthy Cities Movement Universal Design PrincipalsTraining Tools for Accessible Towns.

Castle Circus and Union Street incorporating:-

Torre and Higher Union Street

We would like to see this area developed as a 'latin quarter' with a village atmosphere with its own sustainable community and encourage more bistros, independent character shops – records, music , antiques, pubs cafes, cyber cafes, gymnasiums, alternative art studios/shops.

Some town centre living should encouraged and could be incorporated above shops; the properties in Tor Hill Road could be converted back to residential. With this in mind the main car park should extend its opening hours

The Criminal Law Court should be moved out to the Edginswell area, closer to the Civil Law Courts.

Upton Park

Torre & Upton CP's aspirations for this area are shared. (Friends group will expand on this) 12.06.13

Town Hall Car Park:

Potential site for redevelopment to create a focal point of the Town and could include a supermarket/superstore, multi storey car park, plus residential development to increase footfall and act as a catalyst for regeneration of the wider area, encouraging other businesses offering a fresh bakery, butchers, fishmongers, greengrocers as an alternative to this proposed development to be re-established in this area. Redevelopment would be subject to taking into account the listed building status of some of these buildings. We would also want to encourage better pedestrian facilities with possibly wider pavements and better links to the Union Street development.

A similar development to Paignton Library would be welcomed, as not just a modern library but a centre offering community facilities such as meeting rooms, and education facilities.

Would support Torre & Upton CP who have identified the need for modern offices for our Town Council which would then free up the Town Hall as a potential site for an upmarket Boutique Hotel. (see below).

The Job Centre will not sit comfortably in this revitalised area and would be better sited elsewhere.

Any developments must be of high quality and sympathetic to the area being redeveloped.

Town Hall:
We are also aware that Torbay Action for Art (TAA) have identified this site as a potential Art Centre. Both ideas have some merit and should be given equal consideration. The important thing here will be to preserve and protect the architecture of the building.

Temperance Street :

This is an opportunity to have this area developed as a major shopping area for the town, to take in former works site, and multi storey car park. Suitable uses could be anchor store, quality office space, leisure facilities such as cinema, indoor sports facilities embracing modernisation of multi storey car park on Lower Union Lane and could extend to Temperance Street car park, also including some residential.

Union Parade and Pimlico

These areas to be developed predominantly for retail, commerce and town centre shopping. Opportunity for a major demolition/redevelopment programme as The Hogs Head and surrounding buildings have little architectural merit and we would welcome a landmark building here to encourage further exploration of the Town; possibly a multi use community space incorporating a new library, council offices and possibly a gym. Support the creation of an indoor attraction for example promoting the Town's connections with people like Agatha Christie or Isambard Kingdon Brunel.
Place canopies over large stretches of the pavement and open spaces in the Town, possibly an atrium over the pedestrianised area of Union Street, to make Torquay the place to shop no matter what the weather

Pimlico: Buildings opposite those which front onto Union Street considered appropriate for redevelopment. Suitable uses could be residential, retail or related to a transport hub.

Market Street and Indoor Market:

Create premises as a form of innovation centres to support fledgling retailers to establish their first business. This could in turn be reinforced by significant Town centre residential development and cafe culture. Encourage more residential homes to be created in this area with at least two bedrooms to encourage families to bring life back into the Town out of trading hours.

Melville Hill Community Group; Marvellous Melville
Melville Hill should be recognised as a place of historic charm, with a mix of both private and quality rented housing that is affordable. New developments should include up market, and contemporary schemes that introduce a wine bar and café culture enhancing the neighbouring business and tourist district.

Any developments must be of high quality and sympathetic to the area being redeveloped.

The area should become suitable for people of all ages with Community facilities. There must be no further agreements for Houses of Multiple Occupation or the sub division of existing properties to form single person dwellings

Roebuck House: should remain a commercial premise – residential use would not work here – no parking, no outside space.

Former Laundry Site – Rock Road: Residential use would be appropriate also incorporating facilities in the area to aid community cohesion (eg community facility). Development would need to improve approach to Fleet Walk car park as well as regeneration to Rock Road and Melville Street.

Fleet Street and Swan Street

Create a water feature to replicate the Fleet. Create a glass canopy to enhance the street scene achieve connectivity with the Harbour providing outdoor eateries/ cafe culture/leisure and bijoux shops – The Fleet Walk shopping experience. Whilst the Victorian warehouse buildings of Swan Street offer potential for residential and retail which would retain the exteriors of the existing buildings.

The Strand and Torwood Street

The Strand:

Aspiration for improvement of this key stretch of Torquay Harbour which could include redevelopment of The Strand buildings, including Debenham's. Combination of luxury apartments, improved retail, hotel, small restaurants would be welcomed whilst protecting outlook from the Terrace. Make Torquay Inner Harbour accessible to local people by giving it official community asset status.

Old Opera House:
Also identified by TAA as potential site for a dedicated Arts Centre.

Night Clubs:
Are there viable, alternative uses for some? - these are big spaces.

Pavilion/ Torquay Marina Car Park: The Marina Car Park has the potential for a quality development as this has the best views of the harbour which are currently not exploited. In the responses from the public consultation a suggestion was made "to build a theatre on the Car park accessed via the Pavilion". In addition "turn the existing theatre into a hotel". If the theatre was to remain where it is it is recognised that potential exists to redevelop/extend to enable it to attract West End Shows whilst not expanding out into the Gardens which should be protected. Calls for high quality development and also the need for the harbour areas to remain completely open to the public. Possibility of creating an indoor attraction in this area?

Any developments must be of high quality and sympathetic to the area being redeveloped.

Rock Walk: To provide access to those with disabilities a cable car/ funicular railway from the bottom to the top of Rock Walk would be welcomed in addition to it creating a revenue generating opportunity
Would support **a high level walkway** from Rock walk to a feature development on Princess Pier incorporating a ferry terminal

Amusement Arcade (Cary Parade): Support for redevelopment of this area.

Torwood Street: We would support the development of a mixed use premise incorporating hotel, retail, restaurants and leisure.

The Terrace Car Park: A potential development site with spectacular views with the need to retain adequate car parking for the harbour area.

Future of the Town Centre:
In the public consultation document the comments were:

- Town centre is too spread out
- Future developments must be of a high standard
- Should have a mix of independent traders offering bijou, niche, boutique type shops along with the larger retail outlets
- Restrict the number of pubs and clubs
- Sensitive development – limit the rise buildings
- Emphasis the Town Centre Heritage assets
- Transport and parking are crucial to the future prosperity of the Town

Aspirations for the Town Centre

- Open air markets
- Open air music events
- Pavement cafe culture
- Utilise the Banjo area by holding musical events/school band performances
- Encourage leisure and sport activities
- Create a more diverse late night offer
- Encourage late night shopping supported by food /music activities to encourage residents/visitors to stay on in town

Ways of achieving:

Any developments must be of high quality and sympathetic to the area being redeveloped.

- By introducing zoning into the town it will help to define the prime Town Centre areas to give each part its' own unique identity: Torre Village, Union Parade, Marvellous Melville, The Fleet Centre and the Harbour Gateway.
- Relax planning controls on areas such as Higher Union Street/Torre/Upper Market Street and Torwood Street to enable uses other than retail to be encouraged into the Town to increase footfall.
- Empty shops:-The Town Team currently The Town Centres Co shall be encouraged to place decals on shop windows where the shop has been empty for a month or more, These decals can either

  advertise another business/ display scenic photos promoting Torbay as a holiday destination/Display details of agents involved . Funds raised in this way shall be used by The Town Centres Co or the Town Team and re-invested in marketing the Town by the BID,. This activity should be free of business rates and planning regulations. New tenants shall be free to remove decals as soon as they have the keys to the premises.

Transport

- Traffic does not flow naturally into the Town Centre which requires changes to road layouts to include reversal of traffic flow on some roads to facilitate easier access into the Town Centre.
- Possibility of the relocation of the coach terminus to Torquay train station – a much better location to arrive at.
- Improvements to Torquay station are necessary to make it DDA compliant. Possible move to lobby to increase the usage as at the moment only a branch line which results in poor connection times from Newton Abbot.
- A regular bus service from the Station into the Town centre would be welcomed.
- Support the full pedestrianisation of Fleet Walk to encourage a cafe culture.
- Parking charges need to be assessed to determine whether or not they are having an impact on visitors to the town and sea front.
- Introduce Wayfinding to assist residents and visitors in finding Visitor attractions /car parks.
- Support the introduction of charging points for the growing number of electric cars/bikes now being driven around

Public Realm

Protect the green and open Public spaces area from Cary Green, the Pavilions, Promenade to the end of the Princess Gardens and the 'Sunken Gardens', In addition the Royal Terrace Gardens (Rock Walk) which are all covered under one listing with English Heritage. Torre Abbey and its Meadows should continue **to** be protected by covenant from future developments.

Any developments must be of high quality and sympathetic to the area being redeveloped.