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

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

- Creating better connectivity between Torre and the Waterfront to include retaining the pedestrian bridge that serves our community and disabled visitors parking in Fleet Walk so well with regard to providing access to the harbour.
- More pedestrianisation would be welcomed for example along Fleet Walk which would mirror the course of the River Fleet and create a high quality public open space and in addition 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 area from Cary Green, and the Pavilion, Promenade right to the end of the Princess Gardens and the 'Sunken Gardens', across the road to the Royal Terrace Gardens and Rock Walk (which are all covered under one listing with English Heritage). . Torre Abbey and its Meadows should also be protected by covenant from future developments
6. Make access to public spaces easier for the disabled.(to be expanded by RM)
7. Upgrade of Cary Green and area of public space on the harbourside of the Strand to allow for a range of different activities, and a higher quality environment with better provision of seating and better management of spaces including attractive signage to guide people to the waterfront
8. 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.
9. Protect and maintain our beaches – Torre Abbey Sands and Beacon Cove.
10. Protect the marine environment and develop a sustainable Maritime Economy

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

Roebuck House
BT Exchange Building
Old Post Office
Pavillion
Former Laundry Site – Rock Road,
Jeff Williams
Night Clubs

Pimlico
The Strand
Job Centre
Old Opera House
Hogs Head
Above shop premises
Amusement Arcade (Cary Parade)

Shedden Hall
Torwood Street
Temperance Street

Conway Court
Swan Street

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Castle Circus incorporating: Torquay Town Hall, Lymington Road Car Park, Torbay Magistrates Court, Torquay Library, Torquay Assembly Rooms / Electric House	Cinema in Abbey road

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

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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.

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 new Library is required: a modern facility is fundamental to giving the town the correct image; 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.

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The cinema also needs upgrading and possibly relocating. However, if the cinema is relocated we need to be mindful that this will create a large empty building in an area of the Town already facing many challenges and would suggest the possibility of a much needed community centre being established here.

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.

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:

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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. 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 or for performing arts.

Night Clubs:

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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. However, The height of any development needs to be considered so that this in itself is not detrimental, and thus become a contentious issue to local residents, as was highlighted in the public consultation. In addition the groups have serious concerns about incorporating development of the Pavilion into the large hotel scheme on the Marina car park and would support further investigation for the re siting of the Pavilion to another location which may then enable a lower rise less intrusive development on the Marina car park. A possible option would be to relocate the Pavilion on to a constructed island (with bridges) in the inner harbour, around which boats could still move/moor. The point of the development would be to: Protect the Pavilion (i.e. proper repair with new skeletal steelwork) and make it the centre of a revitalised harbour area; provide a waterside dining/entertainment environment unique in the UK that would encourage a more mature and upmarket night time economy and provide the type of retail experience during the daytime best described as "Totnes by the sea." . If the Pavilion were moved this would allow a larger footprint for the developer of the hotel/spa to build a wider but lower development that could include a children's play area. Alternatively, site the hotel on the island and leave the Pavilion and car park where it is. Perhaps the car park could be topped with a play area feeding off the Pavilion or be the site for an open air public performance space.

Princess Theatre/Pierpoint/Princess Pier:- Potential to redevelop/extend the theatre to enable it to attract West End Shows whilst not expanding out into the Gardens which should be protected.

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

RICC/Balloon Site/Marina Car Park:
There is a chronic shortage of play and recreational facilities within 200 metres of the sea front and we have identified these sites for such a facility

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.

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Area along SW Coast path just beyond Imperial Hotel (Peak Tor): To capitalise on our fantastic coastline, explore the possibility of an open air theatre here to rival the Minnack in Cornwall

Future of the Town Centre:

We would like to see more regular events to create a vibrant lively town centre – markets, music, food etc. Make better use of the bandstand with regular musical events involving school bands and choirs as well as other musical groups. We need to explore ways to encourage leisure and sport into our Town Centre and to provide a variety of undercover attractions for tourists and residents.
We need to create a more diverse late night offer. Whilst we recognise the value of our late night economy we would like to see a broader offer than is currently available. Late night shopping would be of benefit for residents and visitors. We would like to see more done to encourage this.

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 high 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

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Ways of achieving:

- 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. We would welcome the introduction of reasonably priced residents' permits with easy payment options. We accept that charges are necessary but they should be seen to be fair.
  - 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

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

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. Included earlier in document.

The Town & Country Panning Act – Section 215

The Torquay Neighbourhood Plan includes many proposals for the future of the town. However, given the extreme importance of tourism to Torquay, a vital part of the long-term strategy is the general amenity of the area, and this requires a robust and systematic approach to the improvement of run-down or derelict properties and sites.

Section 215 of the Town & Country Panning Act (1990) provides local authorities with the power to compel the owners of substandard properties to take remedial action (subject to certain criteria). The Government is keen to encourage the use of Section 215 as it is relatively easy to use, and has been demonstrated to be very effective in a range of situations; indeed, the mere threat of serving a Section 215 Notice can result in action being taken by a property owner. It is worth noting that one Local Authority was successful in improving 157 eyesores within the space of four years (Source: Town & Country Planning Act 1990 - section 215 – Best Practice Guidance). Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council and Hastings Borough Council are cited by Central Government as "leading examples of LPAs who are using s215 as a regenerative tool". By being seen to use this legislation, councils have also found that other property owners become aware of the need of improvement without having first to be served with formal notice.

We see Torbay Council's wider use of s215 as a fundamental part of the Neighbourhood Plan, as the aspirations of the majority can be completely undermined by the irresponsibility and carelessness of a few.

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