Torquay Neighbourhood Plan

Community led Planning

MINUTES OF TORQUAY NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM
Annual General Meeting
Wednesday 29th June, 7.00pm
Burdett Room, Riviera International Centre plus Zoom

Attendees

Officers of the Steering Group: Rodney Horder (Chair), Cllr Darren Cowell (Vice-Chair), Pat Bishop (Treasurer), Julie Brandon (Communications)

Steering Group Members: Nigel Goodman, Chris Davies, Margaret Forbes Hamilton, Sue Kenway, Julie Brandon, Sarah O'Connor, Alan Griffey, Tracey Cabache (Minutes)

Members of the public: Sheila Horder, Nigel Davies, Andrew Barrand, D Thomas, June Pierce, Cllr Hazel Foster, Mark Hoyle, Brian Wills Pope?, Kathryn Bestwick, Enid Haylock, Lee Caddy, Debra Caddy, Kevin Dixon, Barry Dunnage, Graham Stephenson, Gordon Cain, Patricia Cain, Paul Westwood.

In attendance: Alan Denby, Divisional Director Economy, Environment & Infrastructure, Torbay Council

Apologies: Rodney did you have any?

Item	
1.	**Introduction – Rodney Horder, Chair** Rodney opened the meeting and welcomed those present in the room and on zoom. Rodney outlined the current membership of the Steering Group of the Neighbourhood Forum and explained briefly the purpose of the Forum. The current officers are: • Chair – Rodney Horder • Vice Chair – Darren Cowell • Treasurer – Pat Bishop

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	• Communications – Julie Brandon • Secretariat – Torbay Community Development Trust And the Steering Group Members are Jermaine Atiya-Alla, Sally Baglin, Andy Baker, Roger Carter, Steve Darling, Christine Davies, Gary Goswell-Munro, Margaret Forbes-Hamilton, Nigel Goodman, Alan Griffey, Sue Kenway, Sarah O'Connor, Bruce Porter, John Rawson, Brian Roberts, Bill Taylor, Paul Turner. New members are very welcome.
2.	**Connecting communities** Steering Group members Margaret Forbes Hamilton and Chris Davies were invited to talk more about the work of the Forum. **Margaret Forbes-Hamilton, Torre & Upton CP** Margaret Forbes Hamilton introduced herself, she has been involved in the Torre and Upton Community Partnership since its inception. When the idea of a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) came up she saw this as an great opportunity for the community to influence the future of Torbay. The development of the first Neighbourhood Plan took longer than anticipated. Torquay was one of the largest areas to develop a NP in the country, it was a fairly complicated process for us to develop the plan. But we got there and at the last election there was referendum that bought the plan into being. While the Forum is independent, it complements the work of the Council. Margaret felt that the value of Forum's work was an eye opener for Council staff – the volunteers in the Forum had a lot to bring to the table. We now have to refresh the plan and we have to vote on it again. We have made some minor alterations to make it even more effective. The Plan is not just used for planning decisions – we have also come up with aspirations for where we live. An example of this in Margaret's area is Upton Park. We had a plan to radically improve the park which had been developed and included in the Plan. When £250,000 became available last year through the Torquay Town Deal, the park became an accelerated project and we were able to make substantial improvements to the Park - even despite COVID. Another example of the Forum's work in Margaret's area is the former Magistrate's Court. A flawed planning application was submitted to convert this but early engagement by the Forum led to this being withdrawn. Everybody needs to be aware of the Neighbourhood Plan –they need to know where it is and to look at what it means for their area. The Neighbourhood Forum is now invited to speak on any planning application. We have won that battle, we have a right and we need to use it. **Chris Davies, St Marychurch & District CP** Chris explained how the local Community Partnerships work and how they have come together to create the Neighbourhood Forum in Torquay – the essence of its success is through team work.

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	The Neighbourhood Plan enhances and protects the Bay. Examples of how this is achieved include: 101 Green Spaces have been protected through the plan – 25 in Chris' area. Every week Rodney sends out a list of planning applications for us to review. We have a checklist against which applications assessed to see if they are in line with the Neighbourhood Plans. The relevant Community Partnership leads on this assessment and a response is submitted. Where needed the Chair of the Forum will speak at the relevant Planning Meetings. The Forum both supports and objects to planning applications - We can't always be saying no! This process really empowers the community – making planning community-led. The process has been really effective in highlighting major controversial planning applications. An example in Chris' area is the proposed Sladnor Park development. The plan was for a care village consisting of 159 apartments located in seven 10 story tower blocks that would totally dominate the village of Maidencombe, and had the potential to cause severe flooding to a village where there is no mains drainage system. Sladnor Park is also located in an area designated as countryside and is home to a variety of protected wildlife including Greater Horseshoe Bats and Cirl Buntings. The Neighbourhood Forum supported the community in their fight against this development right up to the High Court which has been gratefully appreciated by the whole community. The Forum also protects local amenities eg protecting Babbacombe Downs and making sure the shelter on the downs was refurbished. Above all the Forum ensures strong and effective lines of accurate communication to the community on areas and developments that are of concern to them. The Forum is an unsung, but a very important, organisation. Chris concluded by thanking Rodney and his volunteers for all the work they do on the community's behalf.
4.	**New projects for Torquay – Alan Denby** Alan Denby, the Divisional Director Economy, Environment & Infrastructure at Torbay Council, shared an update of the current regeneration projects in Torbay broadly promoted under the *Spaces to Thrive* strategy. Alan's presentation is attached as an appendix to these Minutes. Alan outlined that we want to make sure Torbay is a place we want to live in, that young people want to live in or come back to and that businesses want to grow in. The Bay is getting older – our working age population is shrinking. Good school systems – how can we do more to enable young people to see local opportunities? With respect to regeneration – we are at the end of the beginning of making a case for investment in the Bay. We now have the Torquay Town Deal and a number of other regeneration projects in Torquay which include: • Harbour public realm – funded and out for tender • Former Debenhams site – funded and planning application due to be submitted in 3-4 weeks time • Pavilion – rising costs but initial survey work about to start

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- GPO roundabout – public realm improvements being designed
- Change of use at top of Union Street – Need to bring residential back into the town and reduce the retail space to make it more sustainable
- Harbour View Hotel - Midas went into administration in January. 35-40% complete
- Living coasts – Wild Planet have the lease. Selection process for under-leasees
- Lymington Rd - Employment scheme Need for light industrial space
- Edginswell Halt – in process
- Torre Marine – extra care

In other parts of the Bay we have:

- Claylands - Phase 1 complete & occupied. Phase 2 being costed
- Brixham – opportunities for fish market extension and town options being developed
- Further employment space options being developed
- Paignton Future High Street Fund programme….
- Paignton Picture House
- Crossways
- Station Square public realm

We also have the Torbay Place Leadership Group. Doing things in a different way. You may not recognise this – but we are extenuating the positives.

Questions:
AG: Harbourside Hotel. Could they have nationalised Midas to keep it going?
Alan responded. No. The level of exposure would have been too high for a single Council.
JB: Consultation on pedestrianisation on Fleet Street? When will be have that formal consultation. Paignton has had theirs for Torbay Rd.
Alan responded. Fleet St has been a challenge. The Paignton scheme has more resource as it has High Street Funding. Cross party group will meet on this next week, looking to start something in Autumn.
Rodney invited people to add their comments to the Fleet St board this evening.
JB: The Forum should have representation on the Place Leadership Board. We want to work with this group. We have already used the Torbay Story branding on the new Forum Website.
Alan responded that the Forum should write to the Chair of the Place Board. JB: We already have.
There will be a Torquay Town Board and this is about to be developed. Personal perspective – different place now. We struggled to get Business engagement. Jim Parker very successfully has engaged these and we need to link to this. But we have not the Business representation right yet.

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	The Torbay Development Agency (TDA) meet with c.40 of the largest local businesses a year – very few get involved with the chambers, Business Forum etc. We still have a way to go. PB: Re Transport – right turn at bottom of Fleet St – extended bus stop next to Cary Green. NB Mis use of Fleet St re delivery drivers. JP: Pockets of disgrace – Hatfield Cross – housing association site empty for years Old Woods Trading Estate – empty Fleet St and Union St weeds in gutters. We need to make the existing look better as well as build new. Alan responded: re: Hatfield – we do not have the full set of powers to move these things, plus locally we have not had enough capacity for enforcement -this will be resolved shortly. Sadly we do not have a Town Centre Business Improvement District so we lack some of the resources needed to keep the town looking good. Thanks were extended to Alan for his thorough presentation.
5.	**Torquay Neighbourhood Plan Forum - Rodney Horder, Chair** Rodney returned to the work of the Forum with respect to the Torquay Neighbourhood Plan, reviewing Planning Applications and engagement. The Forum has the following ambition - Torquay as the best place to live in the West Country • a vibrant and well balanced economic area • sufficient well paid jobs • homes that are suitable and affordable for all • a revitalised central area offering quality retail, leisure, homes and office space. The aim of the Forum is: • To bring together local people to add value and achieve a better quality of life for the local community. • The express purpose of the Torquay Neighbourhood Plan Forum will be to promote or improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of an area through our objectives And the objectives are: • To promote the economic, social, health and environmental well-being of the Community within each Partnership area; • To provide an opportunity for local people to influence local decision making;

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- To encourage openness and transparency amongst statutory agencies and provide an opportunity for local people to influence the priorities and services of these agencies;
- To improve community leadership for the benefit of the whole area;
- To improve democratic participation by local people;
- To develop area plans to benefit the local community and Torbay as a whole.
- Membership

Forum members are all residents of Torquay, plus those who work in Torquay.

The Steering Group is made up of 5 officers - Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Communications, plus representatives of Community Partnerships (can include Councillors).

The Forum prepares and updates Torquay Neighbourhood Plan, engages with Torbay Council Planning Dept and the TDA, has an input on Planning Applications, and has an input into the allocation of the Community Infrastructure Levy (currently £100,000 to 'spend')

In our experience Cllrs and officers are sometimes at odds. We need to make sure the community's voice is heard. At the Referendum the Torquay Neighbourhood Plan was passed with a vote of 87% - so it carries weight.

There has been a lag with the refresh of the Local Plan and there are challenges as the local authority is not meeting its housing delivery (not site allocation). The Neighbourhood Plan carries less weight if there is not a local 3 year Housing supply. Which is why the Ingelwood development in Paignton/Brixham was approved by appeal even through it was turned down by the Local Authority. We are lobbying to try to get the housing supply targets for Torbay brought down to a realistic level. In the meantime the process between the Forum and the Planning dept is working well as we have a standing invite to speak at planning meetings.
We now have a new website at Torquay Neighbourhood Plan | Our community led plan for the next 20 years
Please join as a member on this site.

Rodney closed with a personal view that we need to take a pragmatic view of the challenges we have in Torquay and, for example, with the Pavilion – it may be better to rebuild a new structure rather than restore the original.
Questions and comments from the audience were:

MH: We should analyse the planning applications approved and find put what has been delivered, what had not and why not.
Have a letter from Heritage England saying that they would not support a patch repair of the Pavilion
ACTION: Mark was asked to send the letter to Rodney.
GS: Holiday homes – we have a lot of holiday homes being built eg Imperial and they are empty 90% of the year. Is this a good use?

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	BD: After Planning decisions there is no enforcement DC responded: Trying hard to rectify this. Recruitment is a problem. The Council had 1 Enforcement Officer in 2019 and for a period a temporary officer. The budget now allows for up to 3 officers – 1 of these for 12 months to clear the backlog. We now have the 3 and have extended the short term post too. But we have 170-180 live cases so we have to target key sites. Very much a priority. Issues with recruitment like all sectors – across all levels. The employment market has been strange since the pandemic. RH: Shedden Hall – application in and we have reviewed it. GS: By-laws and powers to do what we need to do. No up-to-date bye-laws. DC: A lot are out of date – to introduce new ones is very laborious process. Our legal team is always pressured. Lost over third of the Council staff due to the period of austerity so it is difficult to ask the legal team to take this on. Savings in Children's Services have now been achieved and we are redirecting these funds to 'Place'. GS: really effects our tourism offer. DS: Tor2 gone. SWISCo replaced – lots of outdated equipment. That has now been replaced. Man next to Hazel?: I understand the Council was planning on building it own homes DC: Tor Vista is in existence – Council owned Housing provider. It is currently developing houses at the following sites; • Tweenway • St Kilda's • Crossways • Preston Down Rd • Torre Marine And developing a better temporary accommodation offer. But we also need to improve links with other Social Housing Providers. Attract more of these to Torbay. The HELAA (Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment) is coming to cabinet 12th July. We would love new Steering Group Members - please contact Rodney if you are interested. The meeting concluded with an invitation for those present to view the presentation boards displayed on local regeneration projects and a reminder that **Our Plan stands for the right development in the right place.**
6.	**Questions and displays** **Feedback gathered on Fleet Walk (FW)**

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	• Removing buses from FW will enable a cleaner air space when shopping • The Sooner the better, far too many buses • FW needs pedestrianisation, no buses are required • FW - reduce buses, enforce time tables and ensure delivery times for premises are adhered to • Excellent idea as this will encourage footfall and give safety to both the elderly and disabled as well as young children • We support the pedestrianisation of FW • FW should be pedestrianised. This will allow a better experience of shopping as in Newton Abbot

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