



# Minute Item 8

## QBR Q4 / March 2020 – Advance Q&A

### Highlights - Agenda Page 10

#### **Goal 1 – Torrington Pannier Market - Cllr Cottle-Hunkin**

It states “Great Torrington’s pannier market reverted back to the Council and work commenced to revamp the site”. Please can you tell us what work has already been carried out, and what work is still left to be completed? How much has been spent so far on the revamp? I understood there was a significant budget agreed in capital projects for this purpose but I also noticed that it is not mentioned later in the report under “Property & Procurement” which concerns me.

Adrian Redwood - We are part way through a programme of improvements for the Pannier Market. These have concentrated on drainage improvements, re-roofing, replacement lighting, redecoration and security improvements. Other works in hand include the upgrade to the lift and access. The remaining work is looking at the future use of the dilapidated store.

#### **Goal 1 – Brunswick Wharf – Stephen Dengate**

Do we have any indication of time scales yet for the work starting.

Adrian Redwood – The outline Programme for Brunswick is:

- Planning & Procurement through remainder of 2020.
- Enabling works and Quay Wall in early 2021.
- Main build starting later in 2021 / 2022.

#### **Goal 1 – Burrows Centre – Stephen Dengate**

Burrows Centre. How will access to the centre be managed if there is heavy flooding of the carpark area? Is access still reliable.

Adrian Redwood – as part of the revised scheme for the Visitor Centre, the access road is now being included within the project and the levels raised to secure access to the new facility.

#### **Goal 1 – Work in Progress – Cllr Boughton**

There is nothing to report on the development land at Holsworthy Agri centre. What is the plan going forward and when can we expect to see some progress? Now that the council is starting to re build working relationships with Kivells it would be good to see some progress being made.

Steve Hearse – Nothing to report at present. Progress has been delayed due to the Covid-19 situation.

## Goal 1 – Work in Progress – Cllr Boughton

Work Hub. It would be good to keep this in focus to support business in Torridge. Do we have any options at Caddsdwn where a temporary area / set up could be housed?

Chris Fuller – This is an integral part of our Future High Street Fund submission. Although that full project will take a number of years to deliver, we have already held discussions with Devon Work Hubs (DCC) about them being able to support the creation of a shared work space as part of the Meanwhile use phasing of the project. This would mean that while sections of the site are being built out, others are brought alive, for example through the use of converted shipping containers (see Box City in Cardiff as a successful example of the vibrancy that can be created this way).

## Goal 1 – Work in Progress – Cllr Hames

Bearing in mind TDC's low affordable housing figures will measures be taken to ensure that any residential development at TDC's land at Cleave Wood will include 30 per cent affordable ?

How many cases have there been over the last three years of TDC taking action against landlords who have provided sub-standard housing for their tenants?

Shaun Harrington (Planning) – Outline planning permission 1/0626/2017/OUTM was granted on the 30<sup>th</sup> May 2018 in respect of the erection of up to 300 dwellings with associated infrastructure and public open space. The application was accompanied by significant financial viability information, and District Valuer involvement which resulted in a planning obligation package including a 20% provision in affordable housing, and financial contributions towards education and public open space provision. This application was approved following discussion at Plans Committee of the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018. As such, the existing extant planning permission will provide 20% affordable housing.

Janet Williams:

09/09/2016	S20 HA2004 Prohibition Order	16/00545/HATC
27/10/2016	S11 HA2004 Improvement Notice	16/01683/HATC
18/11/2016	S11 HA2004 Improvement Notice	16/02025/HATC
07/12/2016	S20 & 21 HA2004 Prohibition Order	16/02067/HATC
12/12/2016	S11 HA2004 Improvement Notice	16/02164/HATC
26/01/2017	S11 HA2004 Suspended Improvement Notice	17/00015/HATC
13/03/2017	S11 HA2004 Improvement Notice	17/00277/HATC

11/05/2017	S12 HA 2004 Improvement Notice	17/00655/HATC
11/05/2017	S11 HA2004 Improvement Notice	17/00612/HATC
11/05/2017	S12 HA 2004 Improvement Notice	17/00612/HATC
17/05/2017	Part 1, S16 HA2004 Variation of Imp Notice	17/00277/HATC
02/08/2017	S12 HA 2004 Improvement Notice	16/00163/HATC
02/08/2017	S12 HA 2004 Improvement Notice	16/00163/HATC
02/08/2017	S12 HA 2004 Improvement Notice	16/00163/HATC
02/08/2017	S12 HA 2004 Improvement Notice	16/00163/HATC
02/08/2017	S12 HA 2004 Improvement Notice	16/00163/HATC
02/08/2017	S12 HA 2004 Improvement Notice	16/00163/HATC
02/08/2017	S12 HA 2004 Improvement Notice	16/00163/HATC
04/10/2017	S20 & 21 HA2004 Prohibition Order	12/02540/HATC
22/11/2017	S11 & 12 HA2004 Suspended Improvement Notice	17/01430/HATC
29/11/2017	S20 & 21 HA2004 Prohibition Order	17/01645/HATC
06/12/2017	S11 HA2004 Improvement Notice	17/01682/HATC
08/12/2017	S11 HA2004 Improvement Notice	17/01690/HATC
28/02/2018	S11 HA2004 Improvement Notice	18/00278/HATC
03/07/2018	S20 & 21 HA2004 Prohibition Order	12/00044/HMO
09/07/2018	S20 HA2004 Prohibition Order	12/00458/HMO
14/08/2018	S20 & 21 HA2004 Prohibition Order	12/00457/HMO
21/08/2018	S11 HA2004 Improvement Notice	12/00456/HMO
21/08/2018	S12 HA2004 Improvement Notice	12/00456/HMO
12/09/2018	S11 & 12 HA2004 Improvement Notice	18/00872/HATC
23/10/2018	S11 HA2004 Improvement Notice	18/00005/HMO
05/12/2018	S20 & 21 HA2004 Prohibition Order	17/00655/HATC
18/12/2018	S11 & 12 HA2004 Improvement Notice	18/01580/HATC

31/05/2019	S20 & 21 HA2004 Prohibition Order	10/00085/HMO
31/05/2019	S20 & 21 HA2004 Suspended Prohibition Order	10/00085/HMO
31/05/2019	S20 & 21 HA2004 Suspended Prohibition Order	10/00085/HMO
03/06/2019	S20 HA2004 Prohibition Order	19/00586/HATO
03/06/2019	S20 HA2004 Prohibition Order	19/00586/HATO
03/06/2019	S20 HA2004 Prohibition Order	19/00586/HATO
31/07/2019	S11 & 12 Improvement Notice	19/00134/HATC
31/07/2019	S11 & 12 Improvement Notice	19/00134/HATC
19/08/2019	S41 Remedial Action Notice	19/00586/HATO
19/08/2019	S41 Remedial Action Notice	19/00586/HATO
19/08/2019	S41 Remedial Action Notice	19/00586/HATO
19/08/2019	S41 Remedial Action Notice	19/00586/HATO

### **Income – Agenda Page 12 – Harbour Income - Cllr Watson**

Please explain the massive jump in revenue, just seems too good to be true?

Richard Haste – Previous year's income was particularly lower but this year the actual income is in line with the budgeted income. The upturn in income this year was due to increased pilotage at Yelland, not increased traffic within the harbour.

### **Income – Agenda Page 12 – Ian Harper**

Small increase on last year, down on budget, what is the projection for financial year 2020-21 against actual and budget?

David Heyes - Due to the Covid-19 lockdown the Council is projecting a significant loss of income from fees and charges; this is detailed within a report to Community & Resources on 29<sup>th</sup> Jun. The estimated loss for 2020-21 is £1.87m

### **Salaries – Agenda Page 12 – Ian Harper**

Saving on staff moving from Bridge Buildings, what is the actual cost of this building to the Council?

David Heyes – The budget for Bridge Buildings for 2020/21 is £5.9k

## **Revenue & Capital Highlights – Agenda Page 13 – Ian Harper & Cllr Watson**

Legal Judgement - is this the total cost and does it include legal fees?

David Heyes – The legal judgement does not include the legal costs they are included within Legal Professional Fees. The legal costs in 2019/20 pertaining to this legal settlement being £111k

## **Revenue & Capital Highlights – Agenda Page 14 – Ian Harper**

The IFS and Southampton University predict a gloomy picture for lower tier Shire Counties and coastal Towns, is there a short and medium plan to meet this challenge?

David Heyes –The recent report to C&R outlined the financial challenges facing the Council in the short term and over the Medium Term; however this is an ever changing position. The Government announced on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July additional support to local government which should alleviate a proportion of the financial pressures for 2020/21 outlined within the report. With regards to the Medium Term, the impact on the Council's finances will depend upon on the severity and depth of the economic recession.

## **Goal 1 – Agenda Pages 15 & 16**

### **TDC2 .1 Northern Devon Economic Strategy - Ian Harper:**

In view of the current and future impact on business and employment is there both a short term and long term plan to meet this challenge and when will it be implemented?

Chris Fuller – We are working on various levels on this with a huge range of partners. Action planning has been taking place at a Devon level, with TDC Officers involved in various strands of work there and those early Recovery plans have now been published. On a more local level there is a Northern Devon Recovery Group, chaired by Petroc, who have been meeting to look at immediate needs and longer term aspects, both for short term Recovery needs and longer-term opportunities. We are also commissioning expert action planning for Bideford, Torrington and Holsworthy as a follow-on to the recent Institute of Place Management reports. However, the picture is also constantly changing and there remain a lot of unknowns.

### **TDC3 LEADER 5 - Ian Harper:**

Leader 5 - When will this programme finish and will the total grant be spent?

ERDF, why are participants only taking up a quarter of allotted time, will this programme meet its objectives and grant spent?

Update to be supplied at the meeting (Sean Kearney)-

### **Harbour Review - Ian Harper:**

Harbour, what is the actual profit or loss of the Harbour to the Council 2019-20, including pilotage?

David Heyes - The cost of the Harbour and Pilotage service to the Council in 2019/20 (before any apportionment of overheads) was £70.5k.

### **Goal 2 – Agenda Page 17**

#### **Action TDC5 – Empty Properties - Cllr Langford**

Am I right in interpreting it as that staff have had increased workload elsewhere and therefore have not been able to follow up on empty properties as much as would have been hoped?"

Janet Williams - It was a combination of increased workload, long term sickness in the team, and a staff vacancy.

#### **Action TDC5 – Empty Properties - Cllr Watson**

When will there be more progress?

Janet Williams – Dealing with empty properties is a slow and time consuming process involving trying to identify owners, engage with them, encouraging them to dispose of or bring their property back into use, and failing that, make use of a number of enforcement powers available to us, all of which are slow and time consuming. There's also some additional work that would be required in relation to coming up with and taking through the decision making process an EP policy that would outline our approach to the above and most importantly get member agreement on the prioritisation of the empties list. In addition we would need to review/ update the information held by Ctax that would form the basis of the prioritisation list. The last time this was done was almost 4 years ago by someone from this team.

Members have previously discussed whether empty homes would be taken forward into the revised strategic plan. If it had been then that would not have been something we could have progressed in addition to our Housing Renewal workload – I would have put together a business case to look at the costs of resourcing a post for the project. In the end it was concluded that this would not be necessary and EPs would not be a corporate priority. Basically, the costs of carrying out the function significantly outweighs the return we would get in bringing properties back into use. Therefore there will be no progress until this steer changes and the function is properly resourced.

At my last authority we did have an empty homes officer but he was shared with 2 other authorities, exactly for the reasons given above. I have approached the other Devon authorities to see if there is interest in a similar arrangement. There isn't.

While we don't have an EP programme, it doesn't mean to say that we can't and don't get involved in empty properties enforcement by other means. There is a range of legislation relating to dangerous buildings, nuisance and ASB which we use to target properties giving rise to a range of issues, which happen to be empty. I would point to a recent example which involved notices on the owners for rats, nuisance and housing standards which eventually prompted the owners to dispose of the property to a developer – and some significant, but not all, costs recovered.

It also has to be acknowledged that some times homes are empty because the owners want them to be empty. It's not always a case that the house needs repairs, sometimes they are an empty home, because the owner wants them to be.

### **Action TDC5 – Empty Properties - Cllr Hames**

What measures are being considered to achieve rental occupation of empty spaces above shops in towns within the Torridge area?

Steve Hearse – None at present

### **Action TDC5 – Empty Properties – Ian Harper**

TDC 5 This coupled with the increase of households in temporary accommodation, 22. Affordable Housing built, 51 against a need of 171, if the projections of job loss surely this will exacerbate an already difficult situation.

Performance highlights state that this issue is in part due to lack of social housing and unaffordable rent in the private sector. With regards to affordable housing the figure of 171 builds (HEDNA report) is this a cumulative total or per year?

Ian Rowland (Planning Policy) – The figure of 171 builds (HEDNA report) represents the level of affordable housing need per annum (per year).

### **NI156 Households in Temporary Accommodation - Agenda Page 19 – Cllr Langford**

Observation - The items on lack of affordable housing, lack of social housing and lack of affordable rents in the private sector make me very concerned. I read the comment about what some Councils are doing to address this with interest. It is surely something we as a council must take action on.

Helen Page (Housing Options) - With regard to the private rented sector, it is a highly competitive market and we assist those people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness to access suitable housing through help with a deposit and/or rent in advance. The segment of the market that those on a low income are able to afford



has limited supply, and landlords are therefore able to be selective about who they make an offer to and this puts those with a poor tenancy history at a disadvantage. Rents are governed by market forces and LA's have no influence over the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), which determines the maximum that can be received in housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit. There was an increase to LHA rates in April and this was the first for a considerable time, but when there is an increase it is often mirrored by an increase in rent.

Feedback from agents at present is that there are very few properties coming onto the rental market, and high demand for sales since lockdown (although this may cool after an initial flurry of activity).

Rachel Webdell (Affordable Housing) - The lack of new affordable housing is an on-going issue. Whilst I am actively working with both developers and Registered Providers (Housing Associations) to deliver Affordable Housing units, it is the case that the majority of Affordable Housing units are provided by developers through Section 106 agreements. Currently though we only have one developer on site within the Torridge District where Affordable Housing has been secured. Therefore TDC is very much reliant on the private market to deliver affordable housing although I am hopeful, having had several discussions with both private developers and RP's over the past few weeks, that Affordable Housing will pick up pace in the next year or two. The reliance on private developers to mainly deliver affordable housing to address the need within a Local Authority areas, has resulted in an increasing number of Councils in recent times look to deliver their own Affordable Housing.

### **NI155 Affordable Homes Delivered- Agenda Page 20 – Cllr Cottle-Hunkin**

Under "Planning Policy it states "Some councils are reducing the reliance on mainstream developers to deliver affordable housing by developing their own affordable in-house where they still own housing stock or through setting arms length development companies". Where is TDC at with regard to this and have there been discussions around us doing this?

Steve Hearse – this will be looked at in line with our Strategic Plan review.

### **NI154 & NI155 – Stephen Dengate**

Housing stock remains a significant issue. What assurances have we for securing sufficient supply to meet our future requirements?

Ian Rowland (Planning Policy) - It is not possible to provide absolute assurances that sufficient housing supply can be demonstrated in order to meet future requirements; recognising that the supply and delivery of housing is subject to many influences, a lot of which are outside of the control of the Council. Rather, it is important that the Council seeks to ensure that it responds positively and proactively towards the aspects that it can influence.

At the strategic level this is about identifying and planning for the delivery of sites for housing through the local plan sufficient not only to meet the requirements but to

allow for choice and competition in the market whilst also planning for the delivery of appropriate supporting infrastructure and opportunities for economic growth. It is about showing that Torridge is open for business, a good place to invest and develop whilst attracting inward investment (public and private) or providing direct investment where possible. It is about establishing a positive reputation and relationships with stakeholders and seeking to respond positively and constructively to appropriate proposals for housing and other development when they are brought to the Council's attention. And it is about determining planning applications for housing in a timely manner, being constructive and consistent and approving those that contribute towards sustainable development. It is also about thinking creatively as to how the Council can support other routes to delivery, different entrants to the market and innovations to increase supply. The Council certainly uses its best endeavours to pursue actions that can positively influence the supply, although of course, it is always possible to do more and the ability to do so is inextricably linked to, and tempered by, the resources available to support such activities.

Equally, however, it is necessary to recognise that there are many external factors that affect the supply of housing, predominantly outside of the control of the Council and which can often be more influential on delivery – such as the nature of the local housing market, access to finance (both for development interests and households), confidence in the market (clearly impacted by factors such as COVID-19), our rurality, availability of labour and materials, etc. These can all influence the development industry's appetite or ability to deliver, which in turn impacts on supply and the Council's ability to demonstrate delivery.

Whilst the Council can be confident that it has currently planned appropriately to ensure that there is sufficient supply to meet the long term requirements for housing (up to 2031) through the preparation and adoption of the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan, it is much more of a challenge to demonstrate that it has a sufficient supply of deliverable land to meet the requirements over the shorter term (through the so-called five year housing land supply). This is not because it is failing to plan positively and to make best endeavours to carry out many of the actions set out above, but rather because of the nuances of the way this is assessed and due to it being disproportionately affected by many of the factors that Councils have little control over. Officers do however strive to try and ensure that an appropriate supply is identified and can be demonstrated.

### **Goal 3 – Agenda Page 21**

#### **Action – Waste Review - Cllr Hames:**

It has been widely reported that single-plastic use has soared as a result of the Corona virus epidemic. What measures will TDC take to combat this development given its commitment to reduce waste and carbon emissions?

Richard Haste – Since the Corona virus epidemic, Torridge District Council has noticed an increase in tonnage of all material presented for recycling, not only single use plastics. All Devon waste collection authority's and DCC will continue to promote the waste hierarchy of Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Recycle, this will be through social media, waste advisors and shows.

### **Waste Management Measures – Ian Harper:**

Waste management, should be congratulated for providing a full service during these challenging times.

Garden waste does the levy charged cover all costs for this service?

Richard Haste - The levy does cover the cost of this service. In addition if the authority were not to provide the service, a quantity of organic material would put in with the domestic waste and collected via the refuse crews. This in turn would put additional demand / cost on this service.

### **Action – Climate Change - Cllr Cottle-Hunkin:**

When is the Councillor working group for climate change going to begin? I feel there are actually some opportunities as a result of the coronavirus pandemic which we should take advantage of to benefit the environment.

Janet Williams - An invite will be going out shortly for August so that Councillors can consider the draft carbon plan which should be complete by the end of July.

In the meantime, Councillors can contact Janet directly with suggestions on 'post Covid' inclusions in the plan.

### **Action – Climate Change - Cllr Cottle-Hunkin:**

I was just wondering if there is any feedback from the electric car charging points and if we are seeing an increase in usage? How has it been publicised and can the locations be found easily if searched for online by a tourist for example?

Pat Stark (Parking) - We have received some praise from members of the public when they were first introduced, and we have seen use throughout.

The summary of charging sessions from the last 12 months shows:

Churchfields, Bideford	Used 140 times
Holdsworthy, Manor	Used 127 times
Riverbank, Bideford	Used 249 times
Sydney House, Torrington	Used 154 times

Recent usage has been impacted by the lockdown.

As for the public awareness, they charge points appear on most EV point map apps, as well as EV trip planners. The company that put the points in has been making sure that they are visible to the public, as they don't get any income if they aren't used.

#### **Goal 4 – Agenda Page 24**

##### **Action – Planning Improvement Plan - Cllr Hames:**

When will the current vacancy for a planning enforcement officer be filled?

Shaun Harrington (Planning) - Following the advertising of the post, Interviews are being carried out on the 8<sup>th</sup> July with the view of filling the vacancy as soon as practicable.

#### **Goal 4 – Agenda Page 27**

##### **Action – Property & Procurement - Cllr Cottle-Hunkin:**

Has there been any progress in finding a new suitable location for Torrington Cemetery?

Adrian Redwood - The search for an alternative site for the Torrington Cemetery is work in progress and will be the subject of a separate committee report in due course.

#### **Goal 4 – Agenda Page 28**

##### **Debt Collection – Ian Harper:**

LE215 and LE218 is there any way to collect debt or even publicize it?

Karina Baird (NNDR & Income) - Torridge has a debtor collection level of 99% and we actively pursue all sundry debts, following a robust recovery procedure, up to the point where they are no longer collectable. The debts are of a varied nature with many being subject to long term payment arrangements that require monitoring. However, a large proportion of the debt is outstanding elections money which will eventually be paid by the government (but we have no control over the timing of the payment). When debtors are taken to court over outstanding monies owed we publicise cases as appropriate.

##### **Debt Collection – Cllr Watson:**

LE 216, Please explain what the Election debt refers to and why?

Gwydion Batten (Finance) - This is for the 2017 parliamentary election. They have now approved payment and the money is in the Natwest account waiting to be transferred over.

Last year at this time we were owed £187k and this year it is down to £51k, so they have actually paid off £136k but the debt has moved from the 'under 1 year', to the 'over 1 year' column.