

REPORT OF: Head of Communities and Place

To: Community and Resources Committee

Subject: Urban Renewal in Devon

Date: 24.1.2022

Reference:

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

- 1) To seek approval for partnership working with Devon County Council for an urban renewal masterplanning programme and business planning in Bideford.
- 2) To approve £15,000 match funding towards the masterplanning programme and subsequent business planning

1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2021 Devon County Council approved an “Urban Renewal in Devon’s Coastal and Market Towns” report which had been commissioned from economic consultants Hardisty Jones (appendix 1). This forms part of the response to the Team Devon: Covid 19 Economy and Business Recovery Prospectus.

That report was commissioned with the following objectives:

- To identify the common challenges and opportunities for market and coastal towns in Devon
- To consider their relationships with cities, and the opportunities and threats from this
- To identify key opportunities and actions for transformational change, and the barriers that need to be overcome to deliver this
- To consider good practice elsewhere and how this can be applied in Devon
- To identify actions to deliver the opportunities
- To identify pilot towns that should be prioritised for intervention and support in Devon
- To inform County, District and Town Council partners on future policy direction

This report will explore the findings of that study and recommend to approve the proposals and next steps.

2. REPORT

The Urban Renewal study is based on the context of the future role of coastal and market towns in Devon being:

- *Places to live*
- *Places to work (and commute out of to work elsewhere)*
- *Places to visit (for leisure and tourism)*
- *Places to shop*



- *Places to access services (both public and private)*

In fulfilling these roles, towns should be healthy, vibrant, prosperous, inclusive, sustainable, and connected.

A number of shared challenges and opportunities were highlighted within the report which are relevant to the towns across the county and which resonate with issues faced by towns across Torridge;

- *Lack of a governance structure, vision, strategy and action plan for future growth*
- *Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on sectors and activities that are more prevalent in towns such as retail and tourism*
- *Low levels and quality of employment and a lack of employment sites and premises*
- *An ageing population and outflow of younger people*
- *Poor access to education and training*
- *Poor physical and digital connectivity*
- *Often limited electricity grid capacity to accommodate further growth and the move towards electric vehicles*
- *Faded public realm and vacant retail units*
- *Poor housing affordability and poorly connected housing developments.*

However, there are many opportunities for the growth of towns, with common ones being:

- *A surfeit of good ideas and enthusiasm for the future, often within a core group of people in the town*
- *Strong social capital*
- *Plans for major residential and mixed-use developments in most towns, which will lead to population growth*
- *Plans for public realm and town centre improvements, as the aesthetic appeal of towns is important in attracting population and economic growth*
- *Opportunities to attract remote workers into the town centre*
- *Opportunities for workspace, co-working space, and live-work space*
- *Opportunities to increase the night-time vitality and vibrancy of towns*
- *Opportunities to increase the volume and quality of tourism activity*
- *Places for net zero carbon activity, energy generation, and the infrastructure for electric vehicles and active travel*
- *Opportunities for greater local procurement and local supply chain development*



However, time, expertise and financial resources are needed to exploit these opportunities, and the availability of all of these is limited.

These highlighted issues were all taken into consideration as part of the development of the Isaac's Yard scheme and had been raised through the community engagement for the bids (www.bit.ly/KnowingBideford). However, this urban renewal partnership work would now seek to expand the focus of those proposals, which had been previously billed as a catalyst for wider regeneration, to provide resource to develop plans to achieve that wider urban renewal through a mixture of short-term and longer-term measures.

Bideford

Three data sets were also combined to create an overall vulnerability score for the towns of over 5,000 in population.

- **Structural vulnerability**, including old age dependency ratio, Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), income domain of IMD and the claimant count as a proportion of the resident working age population (including the recent change in this figure). Bideford was 3rd most vulnerable and Great Torrington was 15th most vulnerable.
- **Covid-19 vulnerability**, which includes awareness of employment levels in vulnerable sectors and the increase in claimant count since the start of the pandemic. Bideford was 3rd most vulnerable and Great Torrington 22nd.
- **Combined vulnerability index** combining those 2 data sets. Bideford was listed as the most vulnerable town in Devon, although none of the wards are listed as within DCC's 10 most vulnerable LSOAs (Lower-Level Super Output Area). Great Torrington was listed as 19th most vulnerable of the 26 towns included in the study. Barnstaple was the second most vulnerable, with 1 ward featuring in the most 10 vulnerable LSOAs and Ilfracombe 3rd with 2 wards featured.

As part of the report, and stemming from the vulnerability analysis, five case studies were developed across Devon, with a key criteria being that the town had a population of greater than 5,000. The highest priority towns for support based on those data sets, which had not already received recent government funding, were Ilfracombe, Bideford and Tiverton, with Axminster and Dawlish also chosen due to their "readiness for change" and to ensure a breadth of geographies and town types were included .

The Bideford case study was developed following desk-top research, a series of telephone interviews and a site visit which included Town Council representation (Cllr Jude Gubb). The DCC team and consultants saw immense potential for the town's future and were impressed by the strength of the independent retail offer,



in particular along Mill Street and Cooper Street. The hanging baskets also received particular note in that section of the town. Traders who were spoken to were unanimously positive about the potential for the town's development and highly supportive of current schemes such as Isaac's Yard.

The report's summary described:

- *Challenges faced by Bideford include a lack of town centre vitality and a poor quality physical environment;*
- *lack of leisure and tourism facilities to attract visitors;*
- *insufficient employment for the population and low-quality jobs;*
- *and lack of a common vision for the town's growth.*

Opportunities include;

- *the delivery of a proposed major mixed-use development at Isaac's Yard in the heart of the town centre;*
- *scope to consolidate and improve the independent retail offer;*
- *re-use of vacant buildings for co-working space and a creative industries hub;*
- *scope for public*
- *realm improvements to make the town more attractive to visitors;*
- *support for the maritime sector;*
- *and delivery of new residential and employment space in planned urban extensions.*



Recommendations from the report

Immediate actions
Support the delivery of the Isaac's Yard mixed-use development
Establish a regeneration board, vision, and action plan for Bideford
Short to medium-term actions
Prepare a physical masterplan for the town centre, including consolidation of retail provision
Prepare a tourism and visitor strategy for Bideford
Encourage employment in the town centre through the delivery of workspace in vacant buildings
Invest in the Pannier Market to increase its usage and role in the town, including better connectivity with the town centre
Consider how to support the maritime sector and the Appledore shipyard, including alignment of local training
Longer-term actions
Support the delivery of affordable new homes and ensure their connectivity to the town centre
Ensure that more employment space is delivered alongside new homes

This report to Members seeks approval for Torridge District Council to work closely with Devon County Council to deliver on these recommendations, beginning with the establishment of a Bideford Regeneration Board. This should include established members of the local economic community, such as the Chair of the Town Centre Partnership and Ward Members, as well as seek to widen the scope and allow new voices to become involved and add their expertise and perspectives. The Team Economy Manager from Devon County Council, who is leading on this work and wider programme, will also sit on the Regeneration Board in order to facilitate and act as a conduit to relevant DCC teams and wider expertise, as well as providing the core funding.

Procurement for the masterplanning element of the work will be undertaken in January 2022 with a view to work taking place through the spring and summer of 2022. Nonetheless, findings and outcomes will not be completed in time for the Levelling Up Fund round 2 if that remains on track for a spring / summer 2022 launch.

However, early learnings can be factored into that revised bid, depending on the details of the fund and the potential for multi-faceted projects to be submitted. This work will need to closely align to existing work, such as Isaac's Yard (which was heavily praised by the report and consultants during the visit), whilst also integrating with other key strands for repurposing / revamping across the town, including the Library and Town Hall, whilst working with other projects across the town, such as the redevelopment of Bridge Buildings and the growth of the Pannier Market's offer.



It will also be of paramount importance to take significant learning from this work and the external interventions in order to follow a similar series of interventions across the other towns in Torrington. As part of our determination to ensure that these towns are fully supported, it is proposed that the role of Town Centre Project Officer be created to support the dynamism of town centres and to provide increased focus and capacity. This role will work closely with Town Councils and town centre businesses to deliver the findings of these urban renewal processes, hastening their recovery from the pandemic impact and exploring new trading models and opportunities.

It is anticipated by Devon County Council that the work will follow the approximate timetable below. However, they are also clear that they would be keen to see this sped up with local support, as we would be determined to see happen- both to benefit the local community and economy and also to be best placed for future funding or partnership opportunities.

Timescale for Work

26th January – Start

28th February – Meet with all Districts and Towns Complete - Heads up review

31st March – Consideration to potential Govt Funding opportunities launched

End of April – Regeneration Boards developed and first meeting delivered

End of June - Regeneration strategies complete

End of August – Business cases developed

End of Sept – quick wins implemented

End of Dec – close down and final sign off of all documentation

A further 3 months is available if this timetable requires further work



3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

N/A.

Financial Implications

£15,000 to be spent from the Community Renewal Fund Priority Place funding allocation, designed for the development of projects for future funding streams.

OR

Economic Development Project Reserve if the Community Renewal Funding is not released from DCC as expected.

Human Resources Implications

Development of both bids will require significant human resource input from the Economic Development Officer and liaison with other internal teams, including Major Projects.

Sustainability/Biodiversity Implications

Torridge District Council's Climate Emergency declaration and the government's Net Zero agenda will be at the forefront of plans and considerations. Opportunities for regeneration within a net zero agenda and also respecting the Devon Climate Emergency commitments was an element of the brief for this report.

Equality/Diversity

Proposals need to ensure that they create opportunities across the district and take into consideration a range of social groupings in order to further equality and diversity, and creating opportunities for all.

Risk Management

The project will be procured and managed by Devon County Council with strong lead provided by the Economic Development Officer. The establishment of a Regeneration Board, bringing in a wider voice for plan development, will ensure that plans are strengthened.



A strong communication plan will need to be developed in order to ensure that the community is consulted deeply and is provided with regular updates based on those engagements.

Compliance with Policies and Strategies

This work will form a significant part of the Northern Devon Recovery Prospectus' goals to not only create more connected communities but also deliver on wider economic growth. That also connects to the Torridge District Council Strategic Plan ambition to "Develop town centres and the rural offering; recognised as great places to live, visit and invest into".

Development of town centre provision will support delivery of the Northern Devon Tourism Strategy 2018 – 2022, with a specific focus on "Developing the tourism product".

Data Protection (GDPR) Implications

Community engagement responses will need to be stored and used in line with Torridge District Council's Data Protection and Privacy Policy.

Lead Member Views

Date of Consultation- Cllr Hicks 10/1/22



4. CONCLUSIONS

The disappointing outcomes of the Future High Street Fund and Levelling Up Fund were both contrasted by highly positive feedback for the Isaac's Yard scheme. This still has enormous support from a range of partners and the community and so needs to continue to be explored in order to secure funding, with the counter-factual scenario proving highly challenging to the town centre's future.

However, the need for "oven-ready" funding proposals has become acutely important during the course of the last 2 years, and this is only likely to increase. This proposal from Devon County Council provides the opportunity to capitalise upon external funding and capacity in order to develop a series of detailed masterplans and business cases to support in future funding bids and to attract private investment. However, it will be vital to support that with Officer capacity in the form of the Town Centre Project Officer and also to then move the learning from this work forward to the other towns in the district.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Approve £15,000 to be assigned from the Community Renewal Fund Priority Place funding allocation, designed for the development of projects for future funding streams, or the Economic Development Project Reserve if the Community Renewal Funding is not released from DCC as expected, towards the delivery of the urban renewal masterplanning and business planning for Bideford.
- The establishment of a Regeneration Board for Bideford and nomination of the Ward Members as representatives.
- Support the creation of a Town Centre Project Officer role to provide focus and capacity for the delivery of the urban renewal steps required.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Appendix 1- Urban Renewal in Devon's Coastal and Market Towns report

Consultations:	Date of Consultation – Chief Executive, Head of Legal and Governance, S151 Officer
	Officers Consulted –
Contact Officer:	Economic Development Officer

