

REPORT OF: Economic Development Officer

To: Community and Resources

Subject: Bideford Regeneration Strategy

Date: 6.3.2023

Reference:

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

- 1) To update Members on the status of the Bideford Regeneration Board
- 2) To adopt the Bideford Regeneration Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2022 Full Council approved for the Economic Development Department to work alongside Devon County Council to develop a Regeneration Board in Bideford with a view to the development of a regeneration strategy for the town. Bideford had been assessed as being the most economically vulnerable town in Devon and there was no clear sense of cohesion within the various participants who operated within the town and no clear direction for the future of the town centre.

Town centres have been consistently challenged throughout the course of 2022- cost of living and energy crises have reduced disposable incomes and put the business models of both retail and hospitality, which predominate in Bideford, under significant pressure, leading to a number of significant closures.

This report presents the Bideford Regeneration Strategy developed by the Bideford Regeneration Board, with the support of Hardisty Jones Associates, and with feedback from the government's High Streets Task Force, for approval by the Communities and Resources committee.

2. REPORT

Working with Devon County Council the agreed Urban Renewal Programme comprised four stages;

- Establish a Strategic Regeneration Board
- Prepare a Regeneration Strategy
- Prepare a Business Case for a priority project
- Implement quick win projects

The initial "Urban Renewal in Devon's Coastal and Market Towns" report (December 2021, Devon County Council) highlighted:

- *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.*

The first task was therefore to create the Regeneration Board who would be able to represent the core stakeholders within the town centre and drive both the "common vision for the town's growth" and develop a coordinated strategy to either progress other recommendations or create improved conditions to allow them.

The agreed Terms of Reference for the Board state that;

The Board has an advisory, not statutory role. It will shape and guide the future regeneration of the town, setting out a vision and direction for the future of the town, with a view to increasing inward investment. It will advise the District and County Council and other investors and funders about the town's challenges and opportunities, to inform their local activity and investment.

Membership is not prescribed, but the Board should represent the town, including its residents, town council, businesses, and institutions including education and health. It should also include the stakeholders who will help to deliver support for future economic growth (e.g. the District and County Councils). The Bideford Regeneration Board comprises members from: Bideford Town Council, Torridge District Council, Devon County Council, Bideford College, local businesses, local residents (including young people), Bideford Town Centre Partnership, and representatives of the voluntary, arts, and cultural sectors.

An openly advertised process was undertaken to seek business representation (2 appointed), a 16–18-year-old representative (1 appointed) and anyone to come forward with additional relevant skills to offer, from which a local urban planner was appointed to the board.



DO YOU HAVE THE PASSION TO HELP BIDEFORD GROW?



WE'RE LOOKING FOR INDEPENDENT BOARD MEMBERS ON A ONE YEAR APPOINTMENT TO HELP DRIVE A REGENERATION BOARD FOR BIDEFORD.

WORKING ALONGSIDE KEY BODIES SUCH AS BIDEFORD TOWN COUNCIL AND TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL WE ARE ALSO KEEN TO HEAR FROM:

- A 16 TO 18 YEAR AGE GROUP REPRESENTATIVE
- 2 LOCAL BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES
- ANYONE WITH ADDITIONAL KEY RELEVANT SKILLS EG URBAN PLANNING, CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

TO FIND OUT MORE PLEASE E-MAIL ECONOMIC.DEVELOPMENT@TORRIDGE.GOV.UK AND PLEASE APPLY AT: WWW.TORRIDGE.GOV.UK/HELP-BIDEFORD-GROW.

THIS PROJECT IS SUPPORTED BY TEAM DEVON'S COVID-19 ECONOMY AND BUSINESS RECOVERY FUNDING.

CLOSING DATE: 12:00PM, FRIDAY 18TH MARCH 2021



The wider Board also consists of;

- Torrington District Council Lead Member for the Economy (Cllr Hicks), Chief Executive and Head of Communities and Place
- Torrington District Council 2 x Ward Members (Cllrs Bushby and Christie)
- Bideford Town Council 2 x Ward Members (Cllrs Simon Inch and James Craigie)
- Bideford Town Council Officer representation
- Devon County Council Ward Member (Cllr Linda Hellyer)
- TTVS
- Burton at Bideford
- Bridge Trust
- Bideford Town Centre Partnership
- Bideford College

Additionally, the Torrington District Council Economic Development Officer, Town Centre Project Officer, Bideford Communications Officer and Conservation Officer were invited to attend meetings, as was Devon Highways and representation from the Devon County Council Economic Development team.



Process for Urban Renewal in Bideford

Having established a Regeneration Board and elected an external business representative as Chair, a series of workshops were undertaken to establish a Vision for the town's future. These workshops also repeatedly referred to the scoping work undertaken within Bideford town centre by the Onion Collective in advance of the Isaac's Yard Future High Street Fund submission in 2020.

The ten-year vision for Bideford, set out below, has been drafted by the Bideford Regeneration Board.

Bideford will be a vibrant, well-connected and environmentally sustainable waterfront town which provides a high quality of life, education, employment, and leisure opportunities for its residents and hinterland. Bideford is a destination - as a great place to live, with a strong, cohesive community with lots going on for people of all ages and interests, and focused community support for all. It is recognised as a great place for visitors as well.

By 2027 it will be well known as a bustling town centre and quayside area that hosts leisure activities throughout the day and into the evening, as well as regular events which underpin community enjoyment whilst also attracting many visitors. The town is making active steps towards net zero. The historic and unique town centre will be home to diverse businesses, with town centre working being possible in a range of facilities, from co-working and serviced offices to creative making spaces. With an appealing retail, hospitality and leisure offering creating a strong experience economy, including wet-weather attractions, Bideford will be a town that the community is proud of and are keen to contribute to both its present and its future. Culture and the creative arts are thriving, with the Burton at Bideford at the heart of activity, contributing to the town being an attractive locality.

By 2032 there will be a wider range of accessible residential housing units throughout the town, with all new development being net zero. Bideford will have a strong economy with education, training, employment, and career progression opportunities for people of all ages, particularly the young. It will retain and attract high-value SMEs and large employers from a variety of sectors with emphasis on clean maritime and inter-connected innovation work around science and technology, as well as in clean energy and creative arts. The tourism and leisure sectors contribute to the economy on a stronger basis throughout the year, underpinned by appreciation and celebration of our beautiful local environment within the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Young people can see both high-quality jobs and global-leading Higher Education activity within Bideford Bay. As a result they are inspired to succeed within education and then stay within Bideford Bay to have successful careers.

An initial Strategy, Vision and Objectives group was established and as the Strategy emerged a subsequent Projects group was also created. The full regeneration strategy is included in Appendix 1.



From Strategy development to delivery

The initial Regeneration Board provided the key stakeholder input to drive the Strategy. However, this was a large grouping which did not necessarily bring together the key people who will now be responsible for delivering the Strategy's objectives. It has therefore now been agreed by the Board to restructure for a delivery phase.

The Regeneration Strategy, as proposed by the Board, contains a series of sub-themes. The following 8 sub-groups align to the Strategy and are proposed:

- Traders of Bideford
- Business
- Charity and Volunteers
- Education and Inspired Learning
- Health and Wellbeing (which includes leisure)
- Tourism
- Arts, Culture and Heritage
- Sustainability

On a town-wide basis it is apparent that there is a huge amount of activity taking place. However, this is not co-ordinated, and so efforts cannot be combined in many cases to create outcomes that are greater than the sum of all parts.

It is therefore proposed that 8 sub-groups be created to allow more effective coordination for all of these activities across the spectrum. This would also create a stronger basis for larger funding bids, including bringing additional capacity in to support wider delivery, which has been a major hinderance in the past.

A Chair and Vice-Chair will be approved for each group, with the Chair then representing the group on The Board. The Vice-Chair will deputise on The Board when required.

Proposed Board structure:

- Torridge District Council - one permanent seat (Member)
- Bideford Town Council - one permanent seat (Member)
- Devon County Council - one permanent seat (Member)
- Bideford College - one permanent seat
- Bideford Bridge Trust - one permanent seat
- Chairs of the eight sub-groups
- Youth representation (Aged 16 – 21)
- Other community representation x 2 to be chosen through an agreed mechanism

Total members: 15

Proposed advisory participants to invite to Board meetings:

- Town Clerk, Bideford Town Council
- Economic Development Officer, Torridge District Council



- Town Centre Project Officer, Torridge District Council
- Bideford Communications Officer, Torridge District Council
- Devon Highways

These sub-groups will then be tasked with the development of individual action plans with measurable objectives, and will also be able to progress with larger and more impactful funding bids compared to those which are currently possible.

Quick wins projects

- Place branding and self-communication

Bideford has long lacked a unified visual identity. The town has a website, formerly marketed as onebideford.co.uk. This website was launched in 2018 but archived during Covid. From July 2022 the Torridge District Council Economic Development team updated content and migrated and relaunched the site as www.DiscoverBideford.co.uk. This will be further developed in 2023.

Discoverbideford.co.uk WEBSITE	Results 2021	Results 2022
Visits	17,868	26,039
Users	15,159	16,337
Average duration spent on site	1:08	2:05
Total number of page views	29,103	47,733

Discover Bideford has become a flagship project, playing a functional role in creating the image and identity for Bideford. So far this has been established as:

Values: Free-spirited, optimistic, friendly.

Voice: proud yet playful.

Values: Objective: *Promote the heart of Bideford*



Devon County Council provided a funding scheme (November 2022 – February 2022) which the Urban renewal projects across Devon could bid into with a view to moving a number of quicker win projects forward. As part of that, the Bideford Regeneration Board secured funding to support:

- Place marketing support to deliver a range of in-town measures including Discover Bideford-branded bollard covers, flags (where the Christmas trees are normally positioned) and conventional marketing elements to attract people into the town as well as brighten up the streetscape
- Gable ends- a pilot project to create an art installation on a prominent gable end on Mill Street and to evaluate the process, learning and impact
- Support to bring markets forward in Bideford (eat:Bideford on 1st April and a regular farmers' market)
- A business start-up project from Burton at Bideford to support early-stage businesses, or ones which have been trading online, to undertake a low-risk town centre pilot.

A town centre beautification grant scheme to cover town centres across Torridge, funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund, will also be launched in March 2023.

Longer-term initial business case

A very early stage 5-case Green Book business case has been agreed by the Regeneration Board to look at future opportunities for the current Bideford Library and Town Hall given the expected relocation of Libraries Unlimited in summer 2023. Funding has also been provided through the scheme to appoint a local architect with a view to progressing understanding of the building's opportunities and constraints, moving towards RIBA Stage 0 by April 2023. This business case will provide a core basis for recommendations to Council about options for the building's future and subsequent funding bids for project development and then delivery.

3. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

N/A.

Financial Implications

None

Human Resources Implications



Delivery of the Bideford Regeneration Strategy will involve ongoing human resource input from the Economic Development Officer and liaison with other internal teams, including Major Projects and Planning.

Sustainability/Biodiversity Implications

Torrige 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 Strategy development.

Equality/Diversity

Strategy delivery will need to ensure that it takes into consideration a range of social groupings and demographics in order to further equality and diversity, and creating opportunities for all.

Risk Management

- Ongoing reputational risk. However, this is also balanced against reputational damage from not taking any action to support vibrancy and regeneration within Bideford town centre.
- A strong communication plan will need to be developed in order to ensure that the community is provided with regular updates and has a route to engage. The sub-groups should also provide a critical dissemination and engagement opportunity.

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 Torrige 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

Any 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- 22.3.23

4. CONCLUSIONS

The success of the Appledore Clean Maritime Innovation Centre in the Levelling Up Fund provides a significant opportunity for Appledore but also the wider area. To fully attract businesses to invest or set up within close proximity it is essential that Bideford, as the local town centre, offers a thriving local scene across a range of fields- which the 8 sub-themes aim to achieve and can also then truly serve its local community in a range of ways. The Regeneration Strategy provides a key pathway to move this forward and to ensure that a range of stakeholders can align their work to collectively achieve more rather than working disparately or too often in conflict due to a lack of an agreed and coordinated approach.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt the Bideford Regeneration Strategy

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Appendix 1- Bideford Regeneration Strategy

Consultations:	Date of Consultation – 22.2.23 Officers Consulted – Chief Executive, Head of Communities and Place, S151 Officer, Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring
Contact Officer:	Economic Development Officer

