

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCILEXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETINGTown Hall - Bridge Street, Bideford, EX39 2HSWednesday, 12 February 2025 - 10.00 am

PRESENT

Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Chair)

Councillor A Brenton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors L Bach, S Harding, T Johns, H Thomas, C Hodson (substitute for P Shepperd) and C Wheatley (substitute for D Smith) Bach, S Harding, T Johns, H Thomas, C Hodson and C Wheatley

ALSO PRESENT

S Dorey	- Head of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer)
S Kearney	- Head of Communities & Place
E Marston	- Chief Executive, The Plough
F Hardiman	- Trustee, The Plough
H Cooper	- Director, The Burton
R Millward	- Trustee, The Burton
P Parker	- Director, Art Makers
C Keeble	- Chief Operating Officer, Active Torrington
K Brown	- Democratic Services Officer
L Glover	- Corporate Services Officer
K Hewlett	- Electoral and Democratic Services Officer

Councillors K James and W Lo-Vel

291. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Shepperd and Councillor Smith. Councillor Hodson was present as a substitute for Councillor Shepperd and Councillor Wheatley was present as a substitute for Councillor Smith.

292. MINUTES

Members reviewed the minutes of the previous Committee held on Wednesday 08 January 2025. There was a query regarding the CCTV for Victoria Park, on page 4 of the minutes. The Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) updated members on the progress of this work and agreed to share the date a review of CCTV for Victoria Park was started.

It was proposed by Councillor Brenton, seconded by Councillor Thomas and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 08 January 2025 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For 7, Abstentions 2)

293. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were 2 requests received to speak at the Committee. Both speakers were granted their 3 minutes to address members.

Paschale Straiton – Red Herring Community Interest

Paschale Straiton introduced Red Herring Productions, an outdoor arts organisation based in Bideford, which focused on performances in public space and reaching those who do not typically visit theatres or galleries.

Examples of their national and local work were highlighted, including workshops and interactive performances – noting specific projects like the Egg Shack in Bideford and the Stepping Out Festival.

Future plans were also highlighted, including a large-scale project planned for 2028 celebrating Bideford and referencing the Witch Trials.

Grace Rodgers – Contemporary Artist

Grace Rodgers introduced herself as a freelance curator and shared examples of her work locally and nationally. She explained how her work focuses on the natural environment, human connection to nature and community engagement.

Examples of previous work with The Plough in Torrington and a residency at Ben Nevis were all shared with members and Grace highlighted planned work with the Northam Burrows Centre and on the Pebbleridge.

It was agreed that a presentation from Grace would be shared with members following the meeting.

Following both presentations members recognised the need for funding. There was discussion on the variety of ways to support artists, including Councillor grants and the importance of linking with other arts organisations and the Cultural Development Officer at Torridge District Council (TDC).

294. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded that declarations of interest should be made as and when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

Councillor Cottle-Hunkin declared an interest in relation to Agenda Item 297 and 298. She advised she was the Lead Member for Culture and Community, a visitor of The Plough and was a Board Member for Active Torridge.

Councillor Cottle-Hunkin advised that as a result she would hand over the Chairing of item 297 on Active Torridge to another Committee Member and would not take part in discussion.

295. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

296. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

None raised.

297. ARTS IN TORRIDGE

Claire Gulliver, Cultural Development Officer at TDC, introduced herself and explained her role within the Economic Development Team, supporting regeneration projects and delivering the Northern Devon Culture Strategy. Whilst highlighting some of the work taking place the importance of pulling together funding streams and investment was noted along with working with the Arts Council and Northern Devon Cultural Partnership to boost the cultural sector.

Members noted the recent North Devon public consultation on public arts funding and the wants of the community – it was asked if TDC could mirror this within the district. The Cultural Development Officer advised she would be happy to work with Councillors on a similar project.

The Plough

Emma Marsden and Fran Hardiman provided members with a detailed presentation covering the vision for the Plough Arts Centre, focusing on creativity, community, and connection and emphasising the importance of play and fun within their programmes.

The presentation went on to highlight the variety of programmes offered, including live theatre, music, comedy, youth theatre, outdoor theatre and hubs, and community events – and their efforts to continue to attract a younger audience.

The challenges the Plough face were detailed for members –notable issues mentioned were lack of local transport links, as well as increasing energy costs, the impact of the cost of living on sales, the need for funding and the impact of these challenges on the reserves.

The presentation went on to detail how The Plough plans to manage these challenges and their future plans for the building. The buy a brick funding campaign was highlighted, along with the income stream coming from events at the Plough cafe. The key role of volunteers was emphasised and recognised as one of the reasons why the Plough continues to operate.

The Chief Executive highlighted the outreach that takes place at the Plough, their work with schools, the theatre hubs across the district, and she provided some of the positive feedback received from those who attend the Youth Theatre.

In summing up it was noted The Plough will be 50 years old in April this year, and the plans for the 'next 50 years' including how Arts Council funding would be used

Members asked the following questions:

Following a question about The Plough's work with schools and colleges the Chief Executive confirmed this work was dependent on funding and resources to deliver. The Trustee for The Plough summarised links with Torrington Bluecoats and Great Torrington School and provided examples of outreach they'd received funding for. The potential for links with the Burton in terms in future work were recognised.

Members asked about ownership of the building, and the Chief Executive confirmed that the Plough own their building. She went on to advise of the renovation works needed and the aim to install solar panels to help with increasing energy costs.

There was a question regarding outreach work in Holsworthy . The Chief Executive advised that The Plough aim to do as much outreach as possible, but this was dependant on funding, and a need to reduce costs had impacted on this work. Examples of recent work, including Play in a Day, and open Air Theatre were highlighted. The group Torrington Players was noted, and it was suggested they may link to the panto group in Holsworthy.

Members discussed the café and how this sat with the local food offer in the town. The Chief Executive advised that the café was a trading arm of the charity and it was felt that the food offering from the Plough was different enough from the town not to cause any concern in terms of competition. In terms of young people using the Plough, they were provided with food and refreshments when attending the workshops and discounts were also available.

Members went on to discuss how young people were accessing the Plough, the Chief Executive highlighted work taking place with schools, as well as the types of discounts available and the types of immersive experiences on offer to pre-school and young children.

The Burton

Harriet Cooper (Director) and Rob Millward (Chair of the Trustees) introduced themselves and noted similarities between the Burton and the Plough.

The Director for the Burton provided a detailed presentation on the work of The Burton, covering the outcomes for 2024, the exhibition program, the variety of youth engagement work and work with schools, along with their environmental initiatives. They highlighted the importance of their collection and future ambitions, including celebrating their 75th anniversary and the need to expand their space. Feedback from visitors concluded the presentation.

The role of The Burton as Tourist Information hub was also highlighted, along with what this entailed.

Whilst talking about the achievements from 2024 the Director for the Burton noted the number of visitors through the door and how this compares with galleries in the South West and locally in northern Devon. A thriving volunteers programme was highlighted, along with how the exhibition programme aims to benefit local artists and talent.

The success of the Annual School Show (35 schools in Torridge and North Devon) was highlighted, along with the role of the Art Box in sharing the collection and art with schools - especially in more rural areas. Support to children and young people who were being home educated was noted as a growing area, and plans to offer bursaries were confirmed.

When discussing the financial impact of The Burton the Director highlighted their work with local and freelance artists, and how the funding of capital projects was benefiting the local area and local businesses.

Finally, the Director for the Burton highlighted the plans to celebrate the Burton's role within the town and a keenness to become more present and involved in any planned regeneration work. After highlighting some of the feedback from those who had accessed The Burton members were asked for their questions.

Members noted the statistics on the numbers of visitors and asked whether these numbers were increasing. The Director for the Burton advised the statistics for the last few years were fairly consistent, though did note the impact of Covid on the aim to reach the 200,000 aim.

Members commented on footfall to the museum, which is upstairs in the gallery. They also noted the progress that had been made on issues raised at the last Committee – specifically around plans to expand and reach out more within the community.

The Director for the Burton noted the impact of having the museum upstairs and advised this continued to be looked at by the team in terms of the space they have, she also reflected on the balancing of the need for expansion and reaching out within the community – The Burton’s role in relation to activating the Town Centre. Place making and the impact of devolution were also noted in terms of these discussions.

Members recognised the community value of having the Burton and all that it brings, including free access to renowned exhibitions – it was felt that there may be a need for more publicity of this though. The Director noted the feedback and confirmed an increase in marketing and publicity was something to be considered.

Members went on to ask if the visitor figures could be broken down into geographical areas, to show where visitors were traveling from. The Director for the Burton offered to share these following the meeting and provided members with an overview on the spread of visitors, confirming that a large percentage were within the EX postcode.

In terms of public art within public spaces Members mentioned the use of redundant shop spaces to regenerate town centres and allowing artist to showcase work. The Director for the Burton confirmed that discussions were underway with the Economic Development Manager and that potential ideas were being explored. This developed into a discussion about the benefits of using mural art within the town and possible locations, as well as opportunities for local artists.

Councillor Harding left the meeting at 11:39 and returned to the meeting at 11:42

Art Makers

Phil Parker, Director, introduced himself and Art Makers, a not for profit volunteer led organisation supporting over 200 artists in North Devon.

The Director for Art Makers went on to share a detailed presentation with members which focused on the work of Art Makers, and their achievements since establishing in 2021. Support to local artists through their gallery Art Upstairs and the associated online gallery, their workshops and outreach programmes, and collaborative work with the Children’s Hospice Southwest, Appledore Book Festival, Arlington Court and the Burton were all noted.

During his presentation the Director for Art Makers also informed members about the New Atlantic Wave, which referred to the rising profile of around 300 visual artists in northern Devon area, and the significance of this group at a national and local level.

Whilst highlighting the work of Art Makers and some of the artists represented Members were advised of the potential funding opportunities being explored for

the delivery of workshops and for marketing work on behalf of the artists they represent.

The Director of Art Makers then went on to restate the national significance of the rising group of artists within the local area and the need to protect their work and ensure that the group continue to have a profile. The impact of Devolution on the planned work and ambitions of the local area was also touched on, along with national work showing the community benefit and monetary value of the arts.

Cllr Brenton gave her apologies and advised she needed to leave the meeting at 12:02.

Cllr Johns left the meeting at 12:03

The Director for Art Makers summed up for members and reiterated the need to develop a collective voice that can raise the profile of creative people in the area and recognise the national significance and the impact on the local community.

Members then discussed and recognised the importance of art for health and wellbeing on the community and the need to show the value of these groups when the geography of democracy grows. There was recognition of the need to market the potential of the local area and give an identity to the North Devon and Torridge area as an area for culture and arts – it was noted as a theme throughout the 3 presentations seen at the meeting.

The importance of art for those managing their own mental health was also restated by members. It was felt there was an opportunity for a reset in terms of the discussion on arts and culture.

Chair suggested an action to link the work taking place on arts with the work in Bideford on the heritage harbour – to consider collaborative work.

Chair thanked all the presenters for attending and speaking at Committee.

There was a 5-minute comfort break for members.

298. ACTIVE TORRIDGE KPIS

The Chair, Councillor Cottle-Hunkin, declared an interest as a Board Member of Active Torridge and advised members she would step back as Chair and not taking part in discussion.

It was proposed by Councillor Cottle-Hunkin, seconded by Councillor Wheatley and –
Resolved:

That the Chair role be passed to Councillor Hodson for this item.

(Vote: For, unanimous)

The Head of Communities and Place declared an interest as a Board Member of Active Torridge and introduced the item.

The Chief Operating Officer for Active Torridge delivered a presentation for members which highlighted the strategic aims of the organisation, and the key performance indicators:

- Income and Expenditure
- Admissions
- Customer Satisfaction
- Community Impact
- Operational Compliance

There was further detail on what the above indicators would measure and how they would be monitored.

Members asked if the customer satisfaction survey would be managed in house. The Chief Operating Officer confirmed it would be in house and the reasons behind this decision.

It was asked what schemes were in place for those on low income who wished to access the provision. The Chief Operating Officer confirmed this was offered in the membership price and examples of the types of concessions were provided.

Following a question on the Exercise on Prescription scheme the Chief Operating Officer advised that Active Torridge had a referral scheme in place, and there were qualified members of staff trained to provide this service. It was explained that this would develop further when the works to the fourth Active Torridge venue was complete. Further training was also planned for more of the Active Torridge staff.

More detail was requested regarding how the discounted membership was managed, the Chief Operating Officer advised that this was a monthly payment that was discounted and there was no contract so membership could be cancelled quickly. It was also noted that, following a successful funding bid, Active Torridge had provided 100 free annual memberships to people who met certain criteria – future work and funding opportunities were being explored to see if this could continue.

There was discussion regarding the aims of Active Torridge and the impact for the community in terms of the affordability of the service and access to provision – specific concern was raised in terms of competition with other local providers.

The Head of Community & Place advised how the investment from TDC was helping Active Torridge to deliver on providing affordable access to fitness for the community, but further improvements would likely require members to agree further investment. It was noted that the offer from Active Torridge also included

swimming pools and the importance of this provision for the community (being close to the sea) and the costs involved in terms of maintenance.

It was asked when members would start to see the KPIs with populated statistics. The Chief Operating Officer advised that monitoring would start in line with the financial year.

Discussion returned to the types of concessions available to the community accessing Active Torridge, and it was confirmed the discount was 10%. Members were advised that any recommendation to look at this percentage would need to be recommended via Full Council.

Following a question on NHS funding the Chief Operating Officer advised of how NHS funding opportunities were accessed and this remained a focus for Active Torridge.

Members thanked the Chief Operating Officer for attending.

299. ACTION LIST

Chair, Councillor Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin, advised members of her plan to follow up on actions from the meeting today specifically around the Arts - access to transport links, art in public spaces and the impact of Devolution.

212. Cllr Hodson advised of announcement and result from judicial review, which had found in favour of County and a report was to follow. It was advised that applicants may be appealing and the action would remain as ongoing.

220. An update on the action relating to the development of the Family Hub model was provided on behalf of Cllr A Brenton. The action remains ongoing.

271. Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer) advised that this had been chased, but no response as yet.

Cllr Thomas left the meeting at 12:54

300. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Chair advised of the final meeting for this cycle. The forward plan would be reviewed following the AGM.

The meeting commenced at 10.03 am and closed at 12.55 pm

Chair:

Date: