



# Totnes Town Council Strategic Priorities

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TOTNES TOWN COUNCIL

AGREED MAY 2021

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*These Strategic Priorities are based on notes taken at a workshop on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020 attended by Councillors Jacqi Hodgson, Claire Allford, Colin Luker, Georgina Allen, Victoria Trow, Emily Price, Pip Paine, Louise Webberley, Ben Piper, Sarah Collinson, Marion Adams, Paul Allford (apologies received from Allegra Galvin, Sarah Skinner, David Matthews).*

## INTRODUCTION

Totnes is home to a strong, diverse and vibrant community. The historic character of Totnes, still so very evident today, combined with the unusually wide spectrum of local interests and activities, give the town a highly distinctive local identity and an 'edge' which it must not lose. The 2020 draft of the Neighbourhood Plan aims to support and strengthen this, with policies designed to enable local people, business and culture to flourish, and contains policies that strive to deliver this. However, the Town Council goes beyond policies. It has a role with various responsibilities and undertakings to support, sustain and enhance the community and its aspirations; the economy and the businesses that it comprises; the heritage that makes Totnes so unique, and address the issues outlined in the climate emergency action plan. To do this, we are working towards strategic priorities that will make us stronger as a town, more resilient as a social and economic community, and able to face crises such as we are going through now. Councillors participated in a workshop early in September 2020 to identify issues and actions that fit with council responsibilities to take forward. Our focus was:

- Tourism
- Economy
- Community Resilience
- Supporting the vulnerable
- Climate change

### **Other Totnes Town Council Strategies:**

People Place Belonging – a cultural strategy for Totnes

Traffic and Transport

Tourism, Marketing and PR Strategy

Totnes Neighbourhood Plan

Climate Change Action Plan

## THE VISION

Totnes oozes creativity, charm, history and a fantastic vibrant atmosphere. The perfect antidote to characterless cities, this idyllic market town is proud of its heritage. What was once a bustling trade town in the Elizabethan era is now a thriving artistic hub. Boasting the beautiful meandering River Dart, historic castle, huge range of independent shops and art galleries, fabulous eateries, and stunning walks. The UK Transition Towns movement was born in Totnes, the people who live and work in Totnes strive to maintain the diversity of creative industries that have become established here.

However, the demographic makeup of the town is skewed to an older population, and the economic health of the town is hindered by house prices that are disproportionate to

income levels and employment opportunities. The 2020 Neighbourhood Plan identifies these issues and has adopted policies working with neighbouring parishes to help address them. The overall vision is to work in partnership with the relevant agencies, local authorities and local organisations to ensure that new opportunities can be created and supported, offering incubation work spaces, employment and development space, and affordable housing including community led housing close to the town. We want Totnes to continue to be a vibrant, healthy place for people to live, work and thrive.

**Covid 19** has had a major impact on the economy over the summer of 2019. Shops, restaurants, pubs and cafes were closed for 12 weeks, and some are struggling to break even financially as a result, coupled with the ongoing impact of social distancing on premises. The Town Council is working with the relevant agencies and organisations to ensure people are kept safe during the pandemic, and are monitoring the health of the local economy through business surveys and links to support mechanisms including government emergency funding available. However, the Town has maintained it's busy-ness and vibrancy through the summer holidays, and we are optimistic Covid will not affect the Vision we have for Totnes.

## 1. TOURISM

**1.1 Art and festivals.** Build on the town's creativity and food offer – with Arts festivals and food festivals. Multi-location week-long festivities with stalls, events and activities, guest speakers, music, lots of art and food. Make the most of quirky spaces throughout the town. Develop and market a year-round programme that goes beyond open studios.

**Action:**

- Arts Working Group and potential Arts Council bid to pull together an integrated arts and festivals programme (include non-arts eg river see below)
- Deliver 'People, Place, Belonging': Totnes Cultural strategy
- Monitor and deliver the Totnes Marketing Strategy

**Inspiration:** [exeterstreetartsfestival.co.uk](http://exeterstreetartsfestival.co.uk) and [www.dartmusicfestival.co.uk](http://www.dartmusicfestival.co.uk)

**Post-Covid recovery-** we should be preparing for a resurgence of creativity and should harness this.

**Town Council role:** initially facilitate discussions, enable partnerships, support funding bids. Longer term: embed delivery into support from marketing and TIC roles, Event manager and Fundraising officer. Work with **other TICs** and transport providers to improve access, highlight or create new routes to and between other towns for events and activities. Monitor and deliver the Marketing Strategy.

**1.2 River.** Discussion on developing the River as a gateway to Totnes with a strong desire to grow the offer of the river as a destination. This might include encouraging and promoting opportunities for:

- More watersports from the Quaysides;
- More cafes and other refreshment offers (stalls/pop ups?)
- Boat restaurants
- Boat hostels/café
- Regatta(s)
- Water festivals
- Other festivals
- Enhance and promote riverside walks (work with the Ramblers on this)
- A literal gateway – a welcoming artistic arch on Steamer Quay linking to town centre

**Inspiration** from Bristol: <https://www.kylebluebristol.co.uk> and <https://www.allaboardwatersports.co.uk>

**Inspiration** from River Wye: <https://www.wyefloat.com>

**Opportunities:** need to strengthen partnerships with existing organisations and landowners – Rowing Club, South Hams DC, Ramblers and other walking groups.

**Weakness/Threat:** Tidal river – sports, cafes and boat-based hospitality less attractive at low tide. Parking may be an issue – potential at Long Marsh and potential KEVICS?

**Impact of COVID19** – the South Devon Railway hasn't re-opened the Totnes site yet and is struggling financially as social distancing measures and numbers of volunteers (many shielding/at risk) prevent safety measures to be met.

**Town Council role:** development of the vision, partnership facilitator, influencers. Promotion and marketing. Monitor and deliver the Totnes TIC Marketing Strategy

Work with:

<https://www.snark.limited>

[www.canoeadventures.co.uk](http://www.canoeadventures.co.uk)

[www.dartmouthrailriver.co.uk](http://www.dartmouthrailriver.co.uk)

[www.totnes-boating.co.uk](http://www.totnes-boating.co.uk)

[www.thefizzboat.co.uk](http://www.thefizzboat.co.uk)

[www.darttotnes.co.uk](http://www.darttotnes.co.uk)

Riverside Café, Steamer Bistro, Blue Boats and **others (please add!)**

**1.3 Heritage Trails** build on work already underway – seek funding to deliver

**Action:** Discuss Vision and funding opportunities with Totnes Heritage Trust

## 2. ECONOMY

A strong and resilient economy in Totnes is closely linked to tourism, a healthy and resilient high street, support and incubation units for SMEs, entrepreneurs, and the creative industries Totnes is renowned for. Discussions at the workshop included:

### 2.1 Threats and Weaknesses:

- Several links to **Tourism** – the **South Devon railway** attracts a high number of visitors and is currently closed due to covid restrictions. The High Street still a contentious subject, and lack of clarity on exact numbers of people shopping/buying on days the road has been closed.
- Concern that Sharpham Wine and Cheese plan to be moving their tasting sessions, shop and café to larger premises on the other side of the river, taking away a Totnes-based destination.
- River taxis. Concern that the ‘blue boats’ aren’t running now. Post Covid Vision could include a number of commercial boat trips starting and ending their tours in Totnes, and visitor experience extended by visiting the town centre (shops, eateries etc)
- Economic Regeneration – our relationship with the Chamber of Commerce (and their structure and numbers) often poses problems – how to clarify and resolve?

### 2.2 Strengths and Opportunities:

Discussions continued to link issues and potential to Tourism and community:

- Hold or facilitate festivals, street feasts and music events;
- look at spaces and businesses that lend themselves to a European Piazza style evening once a week? Tables and music outdoors
- more cafes - in park and rugby club.
- Totnes about to be listed in national Healthy High Streets – promote as such

**2.3 Growing our economy.** Totnes has a wealth of SMEs, entrepreneurial people, and creative industries – we should prepare for a resurgence of creativity contributing to our local economy, offering and welcoming diversity in all its forms. The Atmos downfall should have been a legacy to the community, without plans coming to fruition we need to identify starter units and incubation units to allow creative development.

- What are S Hams’ proposals for commercial and industrial land or premises? What assets may they wish to dispose of (toilets, car parks, buildings)
- Town Council or Economy Working Group to carry out an audit of potential Assets of Community Value and what potential there is to use for startups etc. Currently only the Market Square is on the list [www.southhams.gov.uk/article/7096/List-of-Assets-of-Community-Value](http://www.southhams.gov.uk/article/7096/List-of-Assets-of-Community-Value)

**2.4 Economic growth and economic activity** has a strong relationship with Community resilience. Our economy should embrace **helping people out of poverty** to contribute to the economy – therefore skills, education and opportunities need enhancing.

Micro-economy/LETS schemes also valuable for helping people out of poverty, and skills sharing in terms of Repair Cafes

#### **ACTION**

- There is a clear need to re-establish an Economy Working Group
- Work more closely with Reconomy, perhaps with a day of ideas and workshops
- Identify and promote availability of incubator/start up units
- Work with SHDC on a land ownership audit and asset transfer potential
- Learn from Towns who have BID or a Town Centre Manager

### **3. COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

Totnes has an active, vibrant and diverse community, strengthened by a large number of community groups and local or community-run services, many drawing on large numbers of volunteers to deliver support to vulnerable groups. The recent Covid emergency has demonstrated both the value of those volunteers in reaching those in need, and the vulnerability of the volunteer infrastructure, as many are older and vulnerable people themselves. We need an intergenerational volunteer force for such activities to be sustainable, particularly through lockdown and social distancing measures.

#### **3.1 Weaknesses and threats to community resilience**

- Ongoing issues with management of the Mansion and TCDS: are they fulfilling their CAT agreement, and if not, can the Town Council take it on? It's a valuable and central underused resource for the community;
- Support services, particularly for the vulnerable or social care providers, seem to be dispersed through town – it would be good to see more collaboration and co-location of services, either in The Mansion and Rushmore House (DCC). In terms of inclusivity, the most vulnerable people are farmed out to offices located in the industrial estate – the Mansion could offer so much more. The current locations of support for young people, services for drugs and alcohol, homelessness etc contribute to the marginalisation and exclusion of many.
- Bob the Bus – concern over sustainability of finances and drivers

#### **3.2 Strengths and Opportunities**

- Well established organisations such as Totnes Cares, Connection Hub and Transition Town Totnes. TTT are currently seeking funding for training younger people in community projects which if successful would help the intergenerational volunteer base to grow.
- Potential for the Caring Town Totnes umbrella to merge into a more centralised role at Totnes Town Council, with a Community Forum and Community Resilience/Empowerment officer coordinating work and projects.
- The need for a Totnes Town Council Equality Assessment Framework (and internal audit partnership meetings, social care etc)

Discussion included a request to consider a Citizens' Charter for the town, and a suggestion to look at St Ives (a community charter) [www.stivescvt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SHORT-St-Ives-Community-Charter-copy.pdf](http://www.stivescvt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SHORT-St-Ives-Community-Charter-copy.pdf) which is very articulate in terms of individuals, community, and municipality responsibilities, with a particular reference to culture and the town assets (built, creative, and natural). Definitely worth a read and a future discussion. More locally, the River Dart has a charter! [www.bioregion.org.uk/project/river-dart-charter](http://www.bioregion.org.uk/project/river-dart-charter)

**Action:**

Continue to support strategic funding opportunities and business development for local groups to gain a point of sustainability;

Encourage representatives of Totnes organisations and Cllrs to join the Community Resilience Forum

#### 4. CLIMATE CHANGE AND GREEN TRAVEL

Both Devon County Council and South Hams DC have a Climate Emergency Plan, if we are to adopt a strategic Priority it needs to clearly identify what the role and responsibility of the Town Council is. The Climate Change Action Group are meeting mid-Sept to integrate all the actions from the workshops held last November and create a cohesive document – how can we pull out town council responsibilities in the Action Plan?

[www.southhams.gov.uk/article/6464/A-Plan-for-Climate-Change-Action](http://www.southhams.gov.uk/article/6464/A-Plan-for-Climate-Change-Action)

Ideas put forward to work up with South Hams:

- Introducing a **congestion charge** to vehicles driving through town. The hill in Bridgetown is notorious for poor air quality. Concept supported by Env Health S Hams, delivering Clean Air Strategy. Monies raised could contribute to Green travel or community energy schemes
- Be more familiar with our Emergency Plan in case of extreme weather, second Covid lockdown or other pandemic etc. Know roles and responsibilities of responders and agencies.

Recruitment for **Totnes Green Travel Coordinator** is complete.

Other issues discussed (most will be in the Climate Change Working group document)

- Enhanced and increased cycle paths;
- Electric Rickshaw/bikes in town;
- Ensure the Railway Station and main line has capacity to maintain services
- Energy for homes
- Energy efficiency – promote Green Homes Grants [www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-the-green-homes-grant-scheme](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-the-green-homes-grant-scheme)
- Reduce traffic

## ANNEX A - How to evaluate future ideas and proposals:

Officers or Councillors to produce a written report on proposals to a standard format, and include that standard template with the following headings:

### **Author name and date of drafting**

**Idea** – short sentence or few words outlining the project.

**Timings** – is this something to be delivered quickly, longer term, does it have a deadline.

**Priorities** - How does the idea fit with the priorities outlined in the strategy setting document?

**Background** – brief description of what is being proposed and how to deliver.

**Resources** – is there any cost, is budget/grant funding available? Estimate of resource in terms of officer time.

**Communications** - Who are the stakeholders, who should the Council consult?

**Reputation** – how could this be seen by the public?

**Officer view** - in light of the proposal, staff capacity, conflicting priorities, financial resource availability, appropriate in house skillset.

These reports would need to be submitted to a Working Group if written by an individual Councillor or officer or directly to committee if already discussed previously, or if considered urgent by the Clerk to go straight to committee for consideration.

These reports must be submitted a week prior to the date of the relevant meeting for consideration.