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Agenda 15b)

D+LC
06/03/25

From: Matthew Pontin <mattpontin@googlemail.com>

Date: 26 February 2025 at 09:30:24 GMT

To: Gary Davis <gary.davis@torpointtowncouncil.gov.uk>, Lizeta Fellows <lizeta.fellows@torpointtowncouncil.gov.uk>, "GELDERD, Anna (MP)" <anna.gelderd.mp@parliament.uk>, kayleigh.dring@parliament.uk, Cornwall Planning <planning@cornwall.gov.uk>

Cc: Cllr Kate Ewert <cllr.kate.ewert@cornwall.gov.uk>, Cllr John Tivnan <cllr.john.tivnan@cornwall.gov.uk>

Subject: Fore Street

Morning all

I was so sad to see another shop on Fore Street (Torpoint) being converted to a flat. When I observe local social media it feels like no-one in town knew that was the plan and 'change of use' just breezes by with little thought to the future of the high street here, nor what communities might want from these social spaces.

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Daskers Ltd Cornish Pasties

Director, R. Rice



This is the third shop in two years and I fear that the ambitious plans for Lower Fore Street will be greatly diminished if you have to walk an alley of flats and bedsits leading to a future town square.

Can preventing change of use for Fore Street be sat within the neighbourhood plan? I've proposed this before. If developers want to make great places for people to live, then I really don't see how street level Fore Street achieves that, it's mostly short-term individual financial gain for long-term community loss.

I fully appreciate that nature of high streets, and feel there are solutions, grant funding and means to encourage new types of businesses into town centre. Bodmin Revival CIC looking at this for their town. Saltash are doing great things too! At the weekend, while in Ilfracombe (which has seen past decline), I noted a cookery school in a small shop - there is a local CIC here looking for something similar, but needs incentives / encouragement.

There is scope to spark new social enterprise and creative organisations to take up such spaces. If you look at 2nd Hand Sundays, they reveal a glimpse of what's possible.

I'm aware that Beauty Within (also on Fore Street) has been sold and new owner will put in change of use. I doubt anything can be done about that as planning is setting a precedent here? How can planning refuse change of use for any street level shops to flats right now? Is there a magic number of shops converted before a developer gets refused?

I'm wondering what is the strategic plan for Fore Street? I'm all about solutions, and have worked in social enterprise and arts sector for over 20 year - I feel bringing stakeholders together here is an urgent *opportunity*.

I have helped established TAC CIC and we've taken on one of the empty shops, awaiting funding decision for refurb, it's demoralising to think foot fall will again be reduced - but I feel that there are solutions and incentives. And what means are there to ensure planning process supports a space where Torpoint residents one day might seek local 'high street' experiences again, test running a small business, feel engaged in Fore Street as a space to be nurtured.

I propose a 'Love Fore Street' round table meeting, I don't think we need a chamber of commerce... but a more a creative approach to how the community can be supported to use and test small businesses on Fore Street... which could also include exploring how the street markets grow (friends have said that these could be more regular over the Summer)

As previously sent, below is new legislation regarding landlords leaving commercial spaces empty - which TTC or Cornwall could implement and support Fore Street.

Happy to give some time... but please read this email as part-complaint (to a planning decision) and part call to action, as myself (and many others) feel the street needs a vision and plan.

Matthew

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-street-rental-auctions-non-statutory-guidance/high-street-rental-auctions-non-statutory-guidance>

There is finance to support admin

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-land-registry-local-land-charges-programme/new-burdens-information>

Overview of the Legislation

The new powers introduced under the **Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023** aim to address persistent vacancy in commercial properties and revitalise high streets through **High Street Rental Auctions (HSRA)**. This legislation empowers local authorities to compel landlords to lease long-vacant commercial properties to businesses or community groups through a structured auction process.

How It Works

1. Preliminary Steps:

- Local authorities identify eligible streets or areas (e.g., Fore Street in Torpoint) and engage with communities for a 28-day period.
- Vacant properties must meet legislative criteria, including being empty for a specified duration.
- Authorities assess property conditions and potential uses, ensuring premises meet minimum standards.

2. Notice and Auction Periods:

- **A Notice Period (10-12 weeks):** Provides landlords an opportunity to lease properties themselves before mandatory action.
- **An Auction Period (12 weeks):** The property is marketed and leased to the highest bidder under agreed terms.

3. Post-Auction Agreements:

- Landlords complete necessary works to make the property usable.
- Tenants begin operations under a structured tenancy agreement.

Potential Benefits for Fore Street, Torpoint

1. Revitalised High Street:

- Filling vacant properties could attract more visitors and boost footfall, creating a vibrant and dynamic shopping environment.
- Reduced vacancies may enhance community pride and deter anti-social behaviour.

2. Opportunities for Local Businesses and Groups:

- Local entrepreneurs and community initiatives can secure affordable spaces to launch businesses or projects, increasing economic activity and social cohesion.

3. Stronger Local Economy:

- Increased commercial activity could lead to job creation and higher revenue for local businesses.
- Enhanced property values may benefit landlords and contribute to long-term sustainability.

4. Community Empowerment:

- Public consultation and collaboration ensure the initiative aligns with the specific needs of Torpoint, creating a sense of shared ownership in the high street's success.

5. Support from Central Government:

- Local authorities can access funding via the **New Burdens Payment** to offset administrative costs associated with implementing the scheme.

Potential for Fore Street

- **Identification of Vacant Properties:** Conduct a detailed survey to identify long-term vacant buildings suitable for inclusion.
- **Engagement with Stakeholders:** Collaborate with landlords, local businesses, and residents to gain support and input.
- **Promotion of HSRA Opportunities:** Actively market the scheme to potential tenants, including small businesses, artisans, and community organisations.

Matthew Pontin

mobile: 07734 429412