

17. LISKEARD TOWN COUNCIL – 5-YEARS CAPITAL & WORK PROGRAMME - (ATTACHMENT A – RFO2024/2025PRECEPTREPORT)

Background – At the last Town Council meeting a report on the receipt of the Cornwall Council Devolution Package was considered. This was in conjunction with the Devolution Package itself and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The Town Council resolved Minute 377/24 to enter into an (MoU) with Cornwall Council as a way of considering the package which based upon other towns experiences is a relationship that might last 5 years.

It was understood that given the scope of the Devolution Package and our own building and facilities projects a 5-year capital programme and plan is needed and this would be one of the items looked at, at a special meeting to consider some of the context and strategy going forward.

Previous Experiences with Uplifts – The Town Council has had previous external issues which has produced uplifts in capability relative to the then capability which have stood the Town Council in good stead for several years thereafter.

Forester’s Hall Scheme – this project was undertaken with several benefits. It occupied a vacant property. This was part of the Webbs Hotel land holding. It had held back the disposal and development of Webb’s for an alternative use. It allowed the Museum to considerably expand out of the current Town Council offices where they had been based. The Town Council staff could move out of the Members Room recently knocked through into the Mayors Parlour. The town had its first Tourist Information Centre. Most of the capital cost was through external grants. There was some capital input from Town Council. There was an uplift in the Town Council’s ongoing revenue budgets with electricity, staffing, materials and the dilapidations sum. This uplift in expenditure did enable subsequent years to have some budget leeway.

Town Council – Council Support Grant (£54,971 2014/2015 – (according to Brenda Furse due for 2% annual increase) – The Town Council was notified that it would be cut by 15% in year one, 10% in year two and a further 10% in the third year. In 2015/2016, the Town Council decided as a Financial Strategy to invest £30,000 in Photo Voltic (PV) panels on the roof of the Public Hall. To reduce operating costs and benefit from the receipt of an annual payment FiT. In subsequent discussions, following Cornwall Association of Local Council’s (CALC) advice, an additional £10,000 was set aside to obtain external legal and technical assessments on sites proposed for Devolution. In subsequent years the combined £40,000 has enabled us to invest in improvements in the Town Council’s own property most notably the Public Hall (4 years combined helping to fund the first phase – without the need to secure grant) – later projects covered including the Public Hall Conveniences and the most recently the Mayors Parlour. The £40,000 no longer appears as a “Devolution” budget.

Christmas Lights £20,000 – more recently in 2023, when the Town Council was considering, whether or not to add the Christmas Lighting to its range of activities. It held a survey to ask if the precept were increased to cover the cost would it be supported. 75% of the of the respondents said - Yes.

Own Capital Projects in the next 5-years – 10years – We also need to bear this in mind our own projects at the Public Hall (Main Hall itself and Council Chamber), Guildhall larger capital improvements, Skatepark/MUGA, Roundbury (phased project), Sports Site Acquisition (Sports Pitches and associated infrastructure), Castle Park (initial phases post transfer issues and subsequent phases) and the Persimmon allotments.

We should also note that the Town Vision exercise has generated a lot of interest from the town and the wider community and catchment area. It will be anticipated that the Town Council may very well carry out some of those relevant capital projects itself. Would also be supportive of other organisations and partners in developing and delivering.

Liskeard Town Council - Strategy – Long Term

Looking at the towns' experiences over the last 10 years and trying to project that forward for the next 10 years, what would this indicate to help with planning. The Town Council needs to look at the context in which the Devolution Package will be considered and delivered over the next 5 years and perhaps, be mindful of the longer-term perspective to 10 years. For a combination of reasons being not least trying to keep the post capital project ongoing operating costs to a minimum. Whilst trying to maintain and ideally improve the facilities operated by the Town Council and our partners.

Council Taxbase - House completions and occupations have increased within Liskeard Parish. This has increased the size of the taxbase. This has enabled in the last 10 years to have average or below average rates of inflation increases and in some 4 years none at all. The number of residential units completed and occupied (not just approved – it could potentially cause issues to have allocated and / or consented sites not come forward).

Partners / Other Agencies – RIO – were giving up a lease and in need of premises and undertook a project that in other towns might have been undertaken by the Town Council and we might have done. Bearing in mind the £100 k capital repairs indicated in 2016 turned into £1.2 million by the eventual delivery in 2023. **Cornwall Council** – as a Local Authority, with the “economies of scale” and income streams and legal powers of a local authority might undertake their own projects on their own sites. Workshed, Integrated Service Hub, Transport Hub etc. Might be advice and Section 106 providers on our schemes, such as, Roundbury, in its phases.

Grants* / Section 106 / CIL / Public Works Loans Board (PWLB)** – Apply for anything that is available and applicable to projects – to support our own projects. Bear in mind the ongoing operating costs revenue impact of the completed project or scheme. Note that VAT advice will be needed. Grants * The experience of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) in particular, is that the funds are heavily oversubscribed. Even eventually successful projects, might, have needed to have been redrawn and re-submitted. Even those submitted by Local Authorities and Universities and organisations with teams that are specialist at making grant applications. PWLB** is a repayable loan. The application process involves ensuring that the business case is robust and will pay the loan back.

Unforeseen – Direct Impact on the Town Council – The closure of the cattle market in late 2017. Resulted in our own 3year lease of the events area as a “mean time-use” of the part of the site. The Cattle Market Makers project’s both the intended capital and actual revenue projects. Would not have been foreseen a couple of years before. However, a change of circumstances prompted the project. **Wildanet** – were looking at either Bodmin or Liskeard as a location of the their new facility which grew into their HQ and training facility that took from 2018 to 2022. **CCTV Control Room** – in 2014 this was housed in a secure room in the old Liskeard Police Station – 2019 Cornwall Council Fires & Rescue Service - actively courted (not just Liskeard, others including Wadebridge and Bodmin) to connect into the NCH and then to the Fire Control Centre at Tolvaddon – Now NCH, Live Monitoring Hub – with Cornwall Council Highways and the 3 east Cornwall town councils.

Other unforeseen’s – In the last 10 years, unforeseen events have had a profound impact on the Town Council’s revenue activities and capital programme. This has required leases and project activities not anticipated a year or two previously. It has had had an opportunity cost in preventing the delivery of the refurbishment of the Town Council properties. To avoid tempting fate no items will be included in the list of things that could close or be considerably reduced. However, any public, volunteer or private sector teams or organisation might go with an impact on the Town Council’s services.

Interruptions – Cornwall Council – typically, we receive 10 – 15 interruptions a day (both phone calls and in person visits to the office). Currently, these are redirected to Cornall Council, but after Devolution – a proportion of them would become ours e.g. pay and displays machine not working - grass cutting / Wilding debate – the abandoned mattresses and fridges. Travellers on the car park.

Impact of False Narratives – this can take-up a considerable portion of the available time and resources and impact the Town Council and the wider town grown. Other towns suffer from the same issue. There has always been “letters to the local newspaper in which the opinion and the person expressing it can be seen. It is the mis-use of social media – unseen - angry about the damage to the wall at Westbourne Gardens, that no-one had yet reported - Reaction to the Christmas trees and lightening going up “ Same old rubbish as last year “ in the street - actually it is not” whether it is about things the Council or Traders or individuals have done or trying to do - **False impact** - this can equal or exceed the amount the amount of time available to deliver the normal yet alone - vandalism in Thorn Park / Rapson’s stopping improving the site.

Staffing implications - from the annual appraisals. The last comprehensive review of the Town Council staff pay and grading structure was in 2016 (the Chris Rolley review). Many of the staff have remained at the top of grade despite their role’s continuing to evolve. A number of other Town Councils have carried out more recent reviews.

Cornwall Council – Costs and Powers - as a Local Authority has its own in-house staff and external advisors retained under framework arrangements. These include legal advice and conveyancing, architects’, chartered and quantity surveyors’, financial advice including VAT advice, enforcement against travellers, and of course the Localism team in themselves. These are all services that the Town Council would need to buy in. So, these would be costs that would be

necessary to take budgetary account of. These would be incurred before any income streams come across which is the point made by some of the other Towns, most notably by Falmouth.

Other Items Taken On / Or Jointly Undertaken With Other Organisations –

- **Defibrillators** – kindly donated by the *Liskeard / Looe Lions and the **Heartswell South West *over several years of fundraising / **donated in recognition of the town’s raising activities, by businesses and community groups.
- **Christmas Lights** – taking over and supporting the businesses and volunteers in Community Groups, such as Liskeard Light’s Up and the Liskerrett Arts and Community Centre.
- **Remembrance Day** – taking a larger role than previously in helping the Remembrance Day and other Commemorative Events.
- **Armed Forces Covenant** – adopting the “Bronze level” commitments, beyond the Reserves to Cadet Forces, RNA, RBL and working with the “Armed Forces Veterans Hub” to set up a Liskeard branch.

Other Towns – The Town Council continues to have one of the lowest Precepts of the towns in Cornwall as per the RFO report to the Town Council including the 26th November 2024 attached (RFO20242025PRECEPT...). The 3 Town Councils that have had a Devolution package and are still in the process of delivering them (with their 2024/2025 precept figures) **are Falmouth (£3,352,214) St Austell (£1,177,920) and St Ives (£1,316,246) and Liskeard £605,197.**

Business Improvement District – (BIDS) – It should be noted that Falmouth, St. Austell and St. Ives all have Business Improvement Districts (BIDS). As do a number of other towns in Cornwall. The income is generated by adding a supplement to the Uniform Business Rates (UBR). The BIDS companies that operate invest the funding in a range of things including events, markets, festive lighting, etc.

Other Devolution Town Experience - In discussions with a number of Town Council’s that have carried out a Devolution Package (St Austell), are carrying out a rolling Devolution Programme over a number of years (Falmouth) and those that have more recently started second year of a 5-year programme (St Ives). Some of their key were:

- **Adopt a 5year – capital programme** to help plan capital projects – workload, budgeting and grant bid support and the Devolution.
- **Provide for adequate legal and surveying fees** – (to enable the sites to be checked for issues and try to result these prior to transfer).
- **Provide for adequate dilapidations** – to be built up against the assets that you are transferring otherwise, they could become liabilities.
- **St Austell Town Council** – referred to parks and play areas, as a particular issue with the scale of reserves required to put into effect the replacement of expensive play equipment.

Local Authority Functions – Now Undertaken by the Town Council – It is useful to bear in mind that the following were previously the activities and costs carried by the current Local Authority Cornwall Council and its predecessors. In some cases, the amount of money might be very small, but the item might be most contentious and consuming of officer time. E.g. the grit bins supplies – where some people take (or in one town steal from all the grit bins and then sell it on social media – not Liskeard).

Toilets – £11,850 – all 3 locations

Grit bins supplies – £200 * contracts through Cornwall Council / Cormac

Dog/litter bin servicing - £600 * contracts through Cornwall Council / Cormac

Weed Spraying - £2,850

Footpath Maintenance – £1,200 – Cornwall Council responsibility placed though the Local Town or Parish Council

Castle Park - £26,650 * Annual operating costs – Capital Projects in various phases are additional.

Eastern Avenue - £1,060 – site acquired (£1) to enable footpath (£38,000) to be provided to improve community access to the Town Centre.

Westbourne Gardens - £800 – initially to assist the establishment of the annual Ploughman’s Festival – which outgrew the site and transferred to the School and Community College.

Roundabout Maintenance - £300

CCTV Ownership and Management - £35,875 not including dilapidations

Total Annual Revenue - £81,385

Active Travel Project – £50,000 grant to undertake a statutory Highways function. In other towns this was not done by the local Town Council but by Cornwall Council.

Cattle Market Makers Project – providing business support and training has helped to fill some of the vacant shops in Fore Street as a result. These were apparently the only Town and Parish Council schemes submitted to the European Regional Development Fund ERDF / European Social Fund (ESF) – These would have been the sort of Economic Development and Business Support initiatives carried out by the former District Council with 600+ staff.

Neighbourhood Plan – a function that would have been undertaken on behalf of Liskeard by the Local Authority. There is likely to be a need for a “Neighbourhood Priority Statement” and possibly the provision of a new Neighbourhood Plan.

Roundbury – a capital project that would have been undertaken on behalf of Liskeard by the Local Authority.

Clerk’s Observations – In the last 10 years, the Town Council’s own capital projects (Public Hall Phase 1) have grown in size and will continue to do so (Guildhall Refurbishment £1.2 million and the various phases at Roundbury £1.2 million) relative to the current budgets and staffing levels.

Our own experience and that of other towns has shown that work associated with Devolution can run for several years and have both foreseen and unforeseen costs and issues. These things need to be prepared for by adopting longer term 5-year capital and project plans.

In addition, the “Town Vision” process has generated a considerable amount of interest with the various stakeholder organisations and the public at large and this will result in a general desire to

see some of the project ideas carried. Some of which might be Town Council assets or naturally be more suitable for the Town Council.

There will also be a range of unforeseen issues not at all directly related to the Town Council, but that might be seen requiring a Town Council input of time and possibly a financial input. In the last 10 years some of the Unforeseen items (closure of the cattle market) have had a greater impact on the Town Council than some of the anticipated Town Council work.

RECOMMENDATION: To assist in the application for grants, the delivery of the Town Councils' large capital and multi-phased capital projects and the consideration of the Devolution Package to adopt a). the use of 5-year capital programme and b). seek external advice on the pay and gradings (last reviewed in 2016) to deliver the Capital and Work Programmes, that will achieve improvements in services and assets for the community of Liskeard.