

DRAFT

GENERAL PROTOCOL BETWEEN EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL AND THE DISTRICT'S SIX TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIPS

For the purpose of this document the term Town Centre Partnerships (TCPs) shall be the collective term used to describe the following six organisations:

- Buckhurst Hill Town Centre Partnership
- Epping Town Centre Partnership
- Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership
- Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership
- Ongar Town Forum
- Waltham Abbey Town Partnership

TCPs have operated in the above six towns within the Epping Forest District since the late 1990s. The Council first endorsed the principle of Town Centre Partnerships in July 1996 in recognition of the challenges being faced by the District's centres (which were deemed typical of small towns nationwide) and in light of Government advice advocating a partnership-based approach to town centre management.

The District's TCPs have had considerable successes over the years. Appendix One is a useful reference which provides examples of projects undertaken by the District's TCPs to enhance their localities in social, economic and environmental terms.

The original terms of reference presented on 29 August 1996 remain relevant and continue to be applicable today, albeit with minor amends (as highlighted) to reflect the current planning policy context. The terms of reference are set out below:

- (a) by working together, to make the best of the economic and social roles of town centres as the sustainable civic focus for local communities;
- (b) in particular to assist economic regeneration by encouraging use of or investment in shops, services, offices, leisure and community facilities;
- (c) to put forward coordinated programmes of action which enjoy the support of the partners, and to consider and comment upon significant proposals of individual partners or third parties;
- (d) to provide an opportunity for the business sector and local communities to influence the policies and programmes of public authorities and others, e.g. town centre strategies and planning policies, enhancement schemes, car parking and maintenance regimes, traffic management, public transport, personal security;
- (e) to assist the regular gathering and assessment of information about the performance of town centres as advised by Planning Policy Guidance 6 (now Planning Policy Statement 6).

Any proposed future amends or additions to these Terms of Reference will be raised and discussed with all TCPs as appropriate.

Although the District Council provides assistance to TCPs (as detailed within this document) each TCP has its own constitution and operates independently of the District Council. The TCPs operate on a not-for-profit basis with any surplus from projects ploughed into subsequent TCP activities.

Purpose of protocol

This protocol applies to all six TCPs in the District.

The District Council provides assistance to the District's TCPs as outlined below. This protocol sets out the basic procedural expectations required by the District Council in return for this investment of resource.

Support from EFDC

The District Council contributes towards the funding of the TCPs in the following manner:

- An annual grant to assist with the secretarial and administrative expenses of the TCP;
- A Special Projects Fund to which the TCPs may bid to part-fund/fund any specific projects/activities.

Funding to the TCPs will be reviewed annually in light of the Council's overall budgetary provision.

The annual administrative grant payable to each TCP shall be raised at the commencement of each financial year. Cheques will be made payable to the relevant TCP and sent to its Chairman. Custody of these funds and payments shall be the sole responsibility of the TCPs.

In many cases EFDC also provides councillor and/or officer input and support to TCP meetings and activities. This helps to ensure effective two-way communication between the Council and the TCPs and other stakeholders. In cases where there is not currently such regular communication, the Council will seek to ensure that representatives are nominated to attend meetings on an ad-hoc basis to enhance communication.

The District Council also convenes a meeting of the District's TCP Chairs once every two months. The District Council will meet administrative costs arising from these meetings. An individual TCP Chair will be elected on an annual basis to act as Chair at these meetings. This election will be conducted by means of a private vote with one vote per TCP. This vote will be timed each year so that announcement of the new Chair will be made at the first meeting of the new financial year (April). These meetings are important and valuable in for example, sharing best practice and ideas between partnerships, seeking advice and communicating with the Council. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development who is the Cabinet Member responsible for these matters, will attend these meetings.

Structure and operation

The District Council recognised from the outset, and supports the fact, that the District's TCPs have evolved over time so that they now differ from one another in terms of structure, scope and activities. The District Council does require however, that each TCP ensures that the following operational processes are in place:

- Each TCP is required to have and to review its constitution with its members on an annual basis;
- Each TCP must be structured to include a duly elected Chairman, Vice Chairman and Treasurer. There must be segregation of duties, particularly so as to ensure financial probity;
- Each TCP is required to hold an Annual General Meeting at which an annual financial report is presented and appointments made to posts on the TCP as appropriate;
- Each TCP is required to consider the health and safety implications and insurance requirements of all its activities from, for example, the installation of Christmas lights to the hosting of community events.
- The Chairman of each TCP is required to attend the bi-monthly TCP Chairs Meetings. If the Chairman is unable to attend arrangements should be made for a substitute from the same TCP to attend in that person's place. It is important that the content of these meetings is relayed to members of each TCP as appropriate whether this is the sharing of best practice from another TCP or news from EFDC.
- Each TCP should be conscious to the fact that District Councillors active on a particular TCP may not wish to comment on planning applications which other partners may feel important to discuss and respond to in a TCP capacity (i.e. larger sized planning applications which may have resonance on the local community). It is suggested that TCPs might place such items at the end of their agendas and include a cautionary note to the effect that District Councillors may not wish to comment or may wish to leave the meeting for this agenda item. The reason for this is that Councillors must be careful to avoid pre-determining their attitude to any application before they receive a full report on all the circumstances as part of the agenda for the relevant Planning Committee.

The District Council will not make any grant payment or consider any application to the Special Projects Fund by a TCP that has not operated adequately in the previous financial year. In the event of a TCP ceasing to operate it is required to refund all unspent annual grant and any Special Projects Fund monies to the District Council immediately.

Complaints procedure

If a TCP finds itself in receipt of a complaint prompt action should be taken to attempt to resolve the situation. If the TCP requires assistance in this regard it may contact the Compliments and Complaints Officer at the District Council. If the TCP finds that it cannot deal with a complaint it should be passed to the Compliments and Complaints Officer at the District Council and be dealt with through the Council's system and procedures.

Secretarial and administrative costs

Each TCP is responsible for making its own arrangements for secretarial and administrative support. Any person appointed to meet this need will not be an employee of the District Council.

Administrative support should be such that at all times each TCP should have an up-to-date electronic circulation list of its members and contacts. Members of the TCP should receive due notice of future meetings as well as clear minutes from each meeting. It is expected that minutes are circulated to all members and not restricted to those that have attended a particular meeting.

It is requested that the Council's Economic Development officer is on the circulation list to receive notification of all meetings and subsequent minutes. This will help to maintain efficient communication between the District Council and each of the TCPs and enable the District Council to provide support and input as appropriate. In addition to receiving updates from the TCPs regular meetings the District Council requires a full report from the Annual General Meeting of each TCP, including commentary on the annual financial report and appointments made to posts on the TCP.

Each TCP should maintain a record of its achievements. This will differ between TCPs but should include evidence such as attendance lists from events, quotes from beneficiaries, press cuttings etc. Such evidence can be valuable in demonstrating a track record of success when seeking external funding for future activities.

In the event of a TCP securing its secretarial support in-kind/part in-kind it is permitted that the administrative grant may be directed towards the delivery of projects by that TCP.

Special Projects Grant

In addition to the annual grant for administrative support, TCPs may submit bids to the District Council's TCPs Special Projects Fund. As mentioned, funding to the TCPs is reviewed annually and TCPs will be advised at the commencement of each financial year of the amount available within the Special Projects Fund.

It is recognised that the difficulty in confirming the amount available in the Special Projects Fund until the commencement of the financial year may hinder the planning of TCP activities for early in the new financial year e.g. spring and summer events. In order to minimise this impact a TCP is able to submit a bid for any such activity during the last quarter of the current financial year. Any such bid will be considered in a competitive scenario (i.e. on an assumption that there will not be sufficient in the coming year's budget for one Special Projects Grant per TCP). Such an application would be subjected to the usual assessment process (as outlined below) and an 'agreement in principle' decision may be reached. This 'agreement in principle' decision will help to facilitate a swift final approval and processing of payment following confirmation of budget at the start of the new financial year.

Completed applications for Special Project Fund assistance should be submitted to the Council's Economic Development officer. Completed applications and supporting material will be considered by the Portfolio Holder and the Director of Planning and Economic Development and feedback will be sought from other Directorates within the District Council as appropriate. As a matter of course applications will also be circulated to all Town Centre Partnership Chairmen and feedback invited and considered. Further detail may be requested from the applicant if required. The

Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development is engaged throughout the process and is responsible for the final decision.

Guidance & limitations for applications to the Special Projects Fund are outlined below:

- The completed fund application form should detail the TCP's proposed project and in particular, demonstrate how the proposed project will be delivered through collaborative working and how the project seeks to benefit the local community in its broadest sense. If the application is for a repeat project/event the TCP must indicate how it seeks to build upon the previous year's delivery and success. All proposals must be inline with EFDC's equal opportunities policy and must be open to both sexes and encourage participation by a range of ages, races, cultural and religious groups.
- All TCPs operate on a not-for-profit basis with any surplus from projects ploughed into subsequent TCP activities. If the proposed project seeks to generate revenue the application should indicate how it is intended this will be invested to further the work of the TCP.
- No salaries, wages or consultancy fees can be funded.
- The Special Projects Fund will not support:
 - Christmas decorations or Christmas parties/switch-on ceremonies
 - Events which sell or promote alcohol
 - Events which encourage gambling
 - Events without a clear community benefit
 - Events which restrict participation to one interest group
 - Events which promote a particular political or religious view
 - Events which aim to unduly influence the outcome of a community consultation or canvass support on an issue that is subject to an EFDC policy review.
 - Events which benefit organisations other than the TCP either financially or politically, with the exemption of funds raised for registered charities.

Review

This protocol shall be reviewed by the District Council at least once every 5 years in consultation with the TCP Chairmen.

APPENDIX ONE

PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN BY THE DISTRICT'S TCPS TO ENHANCE THEIR LOCALITIES IN SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL TERMS

Debden Day

Annual event held in May/June

Debden Day at Loughton Broadway has become an established family event in the local calendar. It is coordinated by the TCP upon the strict ethos that all activities (e.g. rides, face-painting) should be free for all children to enjoy. In staging this event the TCP engages with local retailers and secures support from agencies such as the CDRP, Leisure Services and Epping Forest College. The 2007 event also particularly harnessed and pushed the 'Shop Local' to the local community.

Debden Christmas Market and Shop Local Day

Annual event held in the run-up to Christmas

This event seeks to highlight The Broadway during the festive period. It includes a broad range of complementary activities such as the big switch-on of the festive lights, children's rides, a visit by Father Christmas and entertainment courtesy of local schools and churches.

Buckhurst Hill Green Festival

Becoming established as an annual event held in September

Coordinated by Buckhurst Hill TCP, the Green Festival is a day for the whole family comprising demonstrations, stalls and activities. The 2007 event included a raffle, treasure hunt (with clues held by businesses in Queens Road) and a fashion show for dogs!

Howzat

Annual event held in July

The 'Howzat' Cricket Festival is organised by Loughton Town Centre Partnership and Loughton Cricket Club. It is a family fun day which the Partnership claims is valuable in focusing the attention of Loughton residents on Loughton which is a rare thing. The day includes cricket taster sessions, food and drink, stalls and attractions.

Waltham Abbey Breakfasts for Business

Held on a quarterly basis

Waltham Abbey Town Partnership has established a 'Breakfast for Business' programme providing networking opportunities for local businesses. The Partnership is holding these at tourist attractions around the town (e.g. Royal Gunpowder Mills, Copped Hall etc) in order to generate a greater awareness of what the town has to offer to both residents and visitors alike.

Waltham Abbey Tourism Marketing

Tourism providers in the Waltham Abbey area came together for the first time in 2007 to produce a promotional leaflet highlighting what the town has to offer. An updated version has been launched for the 2008 tourism season and distribution has been extended.

Waltham Abbey Clean-up Day & Abbey Pride

In April 2007 Waltham Abbey TCP brought together a large number of volunteers to give the town a good spring clean.

The Clean-up Day in April 2007 was a huge success, engaging with a wide number of stakeholders in the town and securing positive press coverage. It was however, a one-off event. In searching for something more sustainable the TCP has come up with Abbey Pride. The TCP has produced a professional “Abbey Pride” banner pull-up stand which may be used at events throughout the town and beyond. This stand highlights the key attractions in the town, promotes Waltham Abbey’s King Harold connection and raises the profile of the TCP itself. More than 40 businesses in the town have signed-up to the Abbey Pride Pledge. The TCP is also working to engage young people in the town with Abbey Pride and is working alongside King Harold School.

Ongar Town sign

The Ongar Town Forum coordinated the production of a town map to be positioned centrally within the town centre. Surrounding the map there is advertisement space. The Town Forum has been able to generate an income through the letting of this advertisement space and this income is ploughed into the Forum’s other activities.

[Note: TCP input sought in this section to ensure it is an accurate record and useful reference of the TCPs achievements]