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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Totnes Community Conversation Survey: What You Told Us**

The opinions of 420 local residents and business owners were gathered through Totnes Town Council’s recent Community Conversation survey. The environment and town appearance were identified as the most important issues for respondents alongside the importance of supporting vulnerable local people. When asked what increase in the precept (the amount of Council Tax that is passed on to Totnes Town Council), 54% either agreed or strongly agreed that a small increase of 5-10% was acceptable to maintain local services.

The results of the Community Conversation will now be considered by town councillors, alongside other feedback and reports from business and community groups. Together, these vital insights into local need will help inform decisions on priorities as councillors develop a strategic plan for the next four years to 2027. Councillors remain committed to investment in things like town maintenance, climate change measures, supporting community groups, supporting businesses, supporting heritage organisations, and supporting and promoting arts and culture. However, they acknowledge that as budgets are tighter than ever, tough decisions will have to be made about what can be supported with funds from the Town Council and what cannot. Other, non-financial, methods of support for groups and activities may also be considered as part of the strategic plan.

**Totnes Town Council’s Mayor, Cllr Emily Price, commented**: “Once again, I’d like to thank everyone who took the time to share their views with us. This really will help us to set the right priorities for the town to help it to thrive. There are some clear themes emerging, with the appearance of the town and environmental issues continuing to be the top concern for many alongside the council continuing to support our more vulnerable neighbours.

“Councillors are meeting over the next couple of months to analyse the results and look at what projects and services we are committed to continuing or have a statutory obligation to carry out and the implication on our budgets. We’re also looking at what projects we want to now develop to meet the needs identified in this survey and what areas are no longer a priority. We’ll be carefully considering the budget implications of everything we do and making changes accordingly to make sure we can deliver what local people want in the most cost efficient and successful way possible. The town has spoken and increases of 5-10% in the precept got the highest vote, so we will work with that as our guide.

“As well as the broader questions in the survey, we’ll also be carefully looking through all the comments and suggestions you made to help us build the bigger picture about what local people want. The survey also threw up some repeated concerns for issues that do not fall within the remit of the Town Council. For example, comments about buses, amplified busking, the roads or pavements, and issues with the rubbish bins. We will be passing those comments on to the relevant authorities so your feedback will be heard.”

**Survey results:**

**Overview:**

* 420 completed and (a few) incomplete surveys (101 submitted on printed paper copies, 319 completed online).
* 71% of responses were from people aged 51 years old or over.
* 87% of responses received were from residents, 7% were from business owners in the town and 6% were from people outside of the town boundary.

**We asked: Which themes are most important to you? (tick up to three) The percentage of the votes for each in order of popularity is listed below:**

1. **25% Environment and appearance:** cleanliness, planting, security, maintenance of open spaces, climate change measures, Christmas lights
2. **21% Social:** supporting vulnerable local people with staff time and grants
3. **19% Wellbeing:** provision of open spaces, river access, funding for sport and play facilities
4. **11% Arts and Culture:** events, arts space, public art, live music
5. **11% Heritage:** supporting historic organisations, buildings and traditions
6. **6% Education, housing and employment:** not part of theTown Council statutory functions
7. **6% Tourism and the economy:** visitor information, Visit Totnes branding and promotion, late night shopping events in December

**We asked: Please tick the top six projects or initiatives you consider most important for the Town Council to invest in (in addition to the council’s statutory responsibilities). The percentage of the votes for each in order of popularity is listed below:**

1. **15%: Our Town Maintenance and Assistant Town Maintenance Officer** – undertaking essential general maintenance, gardening, tidying up streets, managing buildings and open spaces
2. **15%: Grant funding directly to local groups**, such as Totnes Caring, Citizens Advice, The Mansion, The Bike Hub, Bob the Bus, Food Bank, Food in Community, Transition Town
3. **11%: Our Sustainability Officer** who works around green travel, traffic management, climate change and biodiversity projects in the community
4. **11%: Developing the Civic Hall** as a local event space and attracting more activities
5. **10%: Holding events** that bring in visitors and enriches the lives of local people such as the Christmas Light Switch On, Late Night Markets, Summer Fair, Spring Festival
6. **9%: Coordinating the TQ9 Partnership** (made up voluntary organisations) which includes the warm spaces calendar, sourcing grant funding, partnership meetings to enable the most efficient support to the most vulnerable
7. **6%: Supporting the Totnes Museum** by providing the building at a low rate
8. **6%: Providing a small fund to subsidise or provide free use of the Civic Hall** for local, non-profit events
9. **5%: Putting public art in public spaces** such as the market square to improve the appearance and provide enrichment
10. **5%: Providing Christmas lights** – this was handed over from the Chamber of Commerce after 2022
11. **5%: Our Visit Totnes brand**, website, social media presence, local business support and national advertising campaigns used to encourage visitors to the town
12. **3%: Our seasonal Tourist Information Centre** in the Market Square

**We asked: Do you have any feedback or ideas about the town to share? Here’s a snapshot of some of the 269 comments received:**

* “Town cleanliness/presentation is highly important.”
* “Parks open spaces and leisure facilities are important. Encouraging the independence of shops.”
* “Precept was significantly raised THIS year. Too little transparency about how OUR monies are spend across town.”
* “Better cycling routes to schools and other towns such as Paignton.”
* “Equal focus on sports as there is on arts - not everyone is arty.”
* “Please could the council attend to the large amount of graffiti around town. If not able to deal with it directly please contact the owners of related properties to encourage removal. Seeing it on the town bridge by the river was demoralising.”
* “Make the Civic Hall wheelchair accessible.”
* “Make Totnes the most Green city in Europe.”
* “The museum windows have not been cleaned for years please do them. Please get our town cleaned up it's a disgrace All 3 councils should be working together to clean up the graffiti.”
* “Commitment to including the community is very welcome. Keep it up!”
* “I think we could probably do with more help tackling hard drug use and helping people get off the street. Failing that try and find a way to prevent people from relying on begging. Would be nice to see groups or events for the LGBT+ community too. :)”
* “Commission local artists to paint any unsightly walls to create art throughout the town as Brighton did to further the special and intriguing aspects of Totnes.”
* “Tourism is a huge contributor to carbon emissions. If you are serious about climate change and air pollution, don't promote tourism! Most tourists arrive in Totnes by car. Let's try to reduce this unnecessary travel by reducing the number of tourists in Totnes. Also, some of them stay in Airbnb accommodation - rooms & homes that might otherwise be rented out to us locals.”
* “Pre Covid there were plans to relocate the large rubbish bins in Bank Lane. Why are they still there? Why are some shops allowed to store their rubbish on the pavement, in a residential area, in a tourist town? This eyesore needs immediate attention.”
* “I would like less traffic and cleaner air in and around Totnes.”
* “More planting, please.”
* “Spend money on planting and tidying up the town. Murals, trees, somewhere for teenagers.”
* “I don’t like the planters on the high street. I think the money would be better spent by grants to maintain the buildings and keeping the street clean.”
* “The historical nature of the town is key to its character and quirkiness, makes it an interesting place to live and attracts visitors. Anything that helps maintain, improve and promote the Museum, St Mary's Church, the Guildhall, the Image Bank, the Costume Museum and all the historic buildings should be a priority. Please do all you can to retain and look after green spaces around the town. Leechwell Gardens are an oasis in the town and very attractive.”
* “More facilities for young people- a better skate park!”
* “Really must get on with an upgrade to the town square is in a terrible state.”
* “Don't think cutting services works, as shown by the current government. The town council are expensive but as long as we get value for it I am happy to pay. Surely the town council should get more money from second home premiums and business rates particularly as you have to now pay for everything to do with Christmas. Also all that money on tourism and business services which should be supported by a town commerce group and South Hams/Devon.”
* “More work WITH the community, finding out what their situation of the in the town is so the council can focus on their needs.”

**-Ends**

For more information, please contact Lucy Ferrier info@visittotnes.co.uk or call 01803 862147

***Background information***

The Totnes Community Conversation survey was launched with the primary objective of capturing the thoughts, concerns, and aspirations of our vibrant and diverse community. Survey forms were posted to every household via Royal Mail, a link to complete the survey online was widely publicised in local print and digital media, and councillors spoke to residents in the market and outside Morrisons during the survey period to answer questions to help ensure everyone had access to share their views. The good response underscores the commitment of Totnes residents to actively participate in the decision-making processes that affect their town.

The valuable insights obtained from the survey will serve as a compass guiding Totnes Town Council over the next four years. The council is committed to utilising this data-driven approach to decision-making, ensuring that the community's aspirations are reflected in budget allocations and strategic planning.