

Todmorden:

Consultations 2004-2019

Review, Findings and Conclusions



A comprehensive report to assess the outcomes of historical consultations in Todmorden

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Commissioned by Todmorden Town Deal Board, June 2022

**TODMORDEN
TOWN DEAL**

Building a foundation to deliver opportunities for all

FOREWORD

This independent report was commissioned by Todmorden Town Deal Board to review the foundation on which priorities were drawn and decisions made for the 2022 Town Investment Plan:

- Were the outcomes of fifteen years of consultations a sound basis for the shaping of the Town Investment Plan?
- Did the Todmorden Town Deal Board get it right when they adopted themes and priorities that had emerged from these consultations?
- Can the current Town Investment Plan that sets the course for the transformation of our town between now and 2025 claim to be **'credible by consultation'** as we suggested?

In 2019, Todmorden was one of 101 towns invited to apply for the Town Deal Fund (originally Stronger Towns Fund). The Todmorden Town Deal Board made up of local representatives from the private, statutory, voluntary and community sectors, was set up in July 2020 to advise Calderdale Council and draw up an investment plan. Against tight deadlines and specific eligibility criteria set by government, the Board undertook a review of the past consultations and also put an open 'call out' for project ideas from across the local community. From this exercise, project proposals were selected, resulting in twelve projects going forward into the Town Investment Plan. The final proposal for up to £25M was submitted in early 2021 and Todmorden was awarded £17.5M in July the same year.

In undertaking the huge task of developing the Town Investment Plan, the Board was aware that historical consultations in Todmorden had resulted in no less than ten significant reports and findings around the town centre regeneration and development. From master plans to feasibility studies, development briefs to town plans. This input and effort by individuals and organisations in each separate consultation process led to little by way of investment. But the articulation of what people want for our town that it facilitated over the years, offered a rich and detailed resource. For the Board, it presented themes, priorities and values that could legitimately form the basis for the biggest prospect for a generation: a £17.5M bid opportunity that could finally realise some or all of those local ambitions.

As we reached a stage where the full business cases needed to be submitted to the board, some were asking does it really add up as the Board thought it did? Do the threads join in ways that made our decisions the right ones?

This independent report was commissioned to comprehensively answer these questions. We wanted to gain a more thorough understanding, not just of each individual report, but if and how as a whole, the findings across past consultations are a valid representation of the themes and priorities important to Todmorden people. This study probes deeper into the nuances of community feelings expressed across the years, maps the consistencies and variations between the different approaches and related outcomes.

It is in itself a resource that aims to shine a light on how things we have talked about over the years connect up or differ in ways we may not have seen so clearly before. We believe it adds even greater value to the contributions of Todmorden people over the years to shape the town they want for the future.

At this time, the Town Deal process continues to be challenging and complex. It involves learning at every stage. It is in this spirit that we share this report and present its conclusions.

Todmorden Town Deal Board
August 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document is an assessment of a series of development reports and consultations on the future of Todmorden. In boundary terms, these reports cover the town centre, conservation areas, and features within these such as buildings, car parks, facilities including Todmorden Markets, public spaces, thoroughfares.

Since the historical consultations discuss many similar issues a rigorous method for assessment had to be established. Assessment involved two separate phases of reading: treating each historical consultation in isolation, and treating the historical consultations as a set, or sequence.

The historical consultations highlight themes of significant interest for the development of Todmorden. Many of these themes are present in each report. All of the reports look forward to development that can improve the local economy. While this is worded in different terms it is ever-present and operative.

Historical consultations are written from different perspectives, with the result that these reports arrive at different conclusions.

The “Council-led” reports emphasise the need for retail space for an improved retail offer within Todmorden, and the need for more residential accommodation.

Consultations with the Todmorden community also acknowledge these needs, but respondents formulate a more nuanced position.

With regards to an improved retail offer, the community emphasises improvements to existing retail facilities such as Todmorden Markets, rather than more supermarkets.

With regards to more residential accommodation, the community emphasises that accommodation needs to be targeted towards particular user groups: accessible accommodation for those residents with mobility needs; and affordable accommodation to retain the younger generation who have to leave Todmorden to find employment that can keep up with Todmorden house prices.

The upshot of this is that despite the apparent similarity and cross-over of the main themes within historical consultations, the “community’s priorities” are not isomorphic with the Council’s priorities.

Discrepancies such as these are not marginal yet have implications for future development. Moreover it is the organisation of reports – the ordering of sections, relegating community’s views to appendices rather than being the main body of the report – that glosses over important nuances from readers.

Reports make a distinction between “location” and “destination”, advocating for a destination marketing project that would have implications for matters such as traffic, accommodation for visitors, car parking for residents and visitors, the local economy and sustainability.

Another important observation from reading the historical consultations as a set, rather than as isolated reports, is that when Todmorden residents have been asked for their suggestions they have been remarkably consistent. Further, this is a vertical consistency, i.e. it is stable over time. This consistency should be taken seriously in any future plans.

A systematic assessment of the historical consultations leads to the conclusion that if readers only had time to read one of these reports, it should be the “Town Plan for Todmorden” (2013).

The author of the current document is impartial and dispassionate about the merits regarding the emphases within historical consultations, whether these are expressed by residents in consultation exercises or expressed by architects responding to planning briefs. However, in methodological terms, this author suggests that consultative reports with residents provide a more reliable, accurate gauge of priorities than externally imposed plans for change.



INTRODUCTION

This document is an assessment of a number of historical consultations on the development of Todmorden, a market town in the Calder Valley, West Yorkshire.

Todmorden is one of a series of towns along the Burnley Road, on the Valley floor. It is situated along the Manchester Victoria – Bradford Interchange – Leeds railway line. These towns (Walsden, Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, Mytholmroyd and Sowerby Bridge) are also linked by the Rochdale Canal. The towns are very different from each other: as this document suggests, the difference between them is an endearing facet for visitors to the Calder Valley. Todmorden differs not only in its history from the Industrial Revolution, being a traditional market town: it also has a distinctive community profile among the towns in the Calder Valley.

Historically, despite their decline, market towns “remained agreeable residential locations for the wealthy. Certainly at this time they showed no great propensity to challenge their relative decline with promotional strategies”.¹ As the reports assessed in this document detail, this attitude has changed in Todmorden in the Twenty First Century.

Due to the timing of the historical consultations within the set, there are certain (policy and political) matters that are of contemporary relevance. Specifically, on sustainability and local economic growth. Reading the historical consultations it is clear to this author that themes highlighted for the development of Todmorden have direct salience for contemporary agendas. As such, this document addresses the matching of residents’ local concerns for Todmorden with wider national objectives, including COP26, the Northern Powerhouse and the Levelling Up Agenda.

This assessment of the historical consultations will discuss the nature of the reports under its purview. One of the issues that is less apparent from these reports is what may be called *momentum*. Specifically, we mean the self-generating and self-perpetuating drive created by a visibly developing area. Reports acknowledge that previously suggested projects “would lead to many of the social, economic and ‘placemaking’ outcomes desired of the [Stronger Towns Fund]” (STF p2). We are in full agreement with this. We suggest also that when an area is seen to be thriving, businesses want to locate there in order to benefit from the accelerated dynamism, e.g. increased footfall, improved access, attractiveness – that has

¹ Stephen V. Ward (2005) *Selling Places: The Marketing And Promotion Of Towns And Cities 1850–2000*. London: Routledge, p. 31.

been created. Dynamism encourages more footfall and more businesses – an ever-increasing circle as development attracts development, and so on. These tangible benefits impact on less tangible aspects, also.

The Historical Consultations: Sources for this Report

This document is based upon a series of development reports and consultations:

- Upper Calder Valley Renaissance (2004) Master Plan
- Calderdale Council (2007) Todmorden Conservation Area Character Appraisal (Appendices)
- Todmorden Town Centre Renaissance Board (2008) Todmorden Town Centre Development Brief
- Todmorden Town Council (2013) Town Plan for Todmorden
- Todmorden Market Futures Steering Group (2014) A Feasibility Report on the Future Of Todmorden Markets
- Upper Calder Valley Renaissance (2015) Taking Stock and Looking Forward
- Calderdale Council (2016) Development Brief: Bramsche Square/Rose Street Site in Todmorden
- Plus Integreat (2017) Todmorden Neighbourhood Plan
- Aspinall Verdi (2018) Rose Street / Bramsche Square, Todmorden - Site Unlocking Study
- Todmorden Civic Pride (2019) Todmorden “Stronger Towns Fund” Potential Projects
- Todmorden Town Investment Plan Section 1 (2021) (“TIP”)

The Todmorden Town Deal website makes these reports available at the drop down menu from its “Community Engagement” tab [<https://www.todmordentowndeal.co.uk/historic-consultation/>]

Statement on Inclusivity

While the individual reports are compartmentalised – it is rare for them to cross-reference each other – one of the early reports contains a statement on inclusivity, what it calls “community involvement”: “we will involve all sections of the community irrespective of class, gender, race, religious belief, disability, age or sexuality in the process” [UCV Renaissance 2004, unpaginated, in Renaissance Charter]

It is a working assumption that this charter statement is one that is shared throughout the set of reports, this current overview and synopsis of the historical consultations, and provides a core context for any future work on Todmorden



Town Deal Board members at Open Day

Statement of Reflexivity

The author of this current report is an applied researcher in information management with a longstanding track record of work in methods and methodologies, published in highly respected, international peer-reviewed journals. The author has written evaluation reports for non-governmental organisations and consulted for a variety of institutions in Asia, Mainland Europe and the UK. The author’s work includes practical studies on markets and independent

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retailers, project management, public spaces, behaviour in public spaces, and urban development.

This author regards the set of historic consultations surveyed to be excellent examples of urban potential, of future planning, of stakeholder sampling, and of community engagement.

Characterising the Historical Consultations

The array of reports itemised as sources for this current document constitutes various perspectives and contain interests and views of stakeholders in the enhancement of Todmorden and spaces in its environs. These reports are not solely reflective of the views of their authors, or the range of stakeholders mentioned in them. Each is keen to discuss issues of methodology (method used; sampling) and implications, i.e. the upshot of results for planning.

It is possible to categorise the historical consultations according to imprimatur or what, in information management, is sometimes called “statements of responsibility”. “Statements of responsibility” is a term that does not distinguish between single authors, multiple authors, and organisations. Statements of responsibility are important when evaluating the position of the author in regards to the issues covered in reports (see “Balancing Acts” below).

A feature of consultation processes, particularly those involving workshopping and public meetings, is that the level of emotion and strength of feeling is removed when producing the written version of the report. This is a normal trouble of reports on public consultation.

In addition to individual passion when advancing arguments, what is missing is the practice of consultation. A report is an end product of a series of consultations, conversations, debates, disagreements, etc. Any report is a summative statement that omits, of necessity, the collaborative aspect of people advancing positions, accommodating different points of view, resolving disagreements, and arriving at decisions. This is another normal trouble of reports on public consultation.

While we are unable to witness stakeholders’ oral testimonies in written reports there is another, serious dynamic at play. What is noticeable and notable in the written reports is the consistent repetition of themes. As systematic reading proceeds in a cumulative fashion, the articulation of themes becomes a reiteration of familiar suggestions.

It is clear from the reports that there are many features of Todmorden that are characteristic of the town for both residents and visitors – the favourable mentions and recurrence of these features within the reports form convincing testimony that these should be protected and enhanced. These included the buildings and views of buildings, the canal, the indoor and outdoor markets, the pavements. The “Town Plan for Todmorden” (2013) is recommended reading.

Methods for this Assessment

Characterising the consultation process above allows us to comment upon the methods used in assembling this synoptic report. The assessment reported here has involved a methodical embellishment of desk research. Each of the reports has been subject to systematic and repeated readings:

- If treated in isolation – for example, reading any one of these historical consultations – one can become familiar with a snapshot view of what stakeholders thought of their locality at a particular time. We can think of this as an “episodic” approach, as though we were studying a still photograph.
- Studying the array of consultations together has a different “texture” from isolated readings. While holding the topic of Todmorden relatively constant, the move from isolated readings to readings to a set of readings alters what can be gleaned from each individual report. This is a “time-series” approach, as though we were studying a film – moving pictures instead of a still photograph.

There are two aspects to this time-series approach:

1. The systematic study of reports written over a period time affords the identification of similar or changing priorities
2. As a longitudinal exercise, these reports document that issues identified in [2004] map onto issues identified in [2019]

By taking consultations as a set rather than as compartmentalised studies the reader is aware that themes contained in consultations are steady and consistent over time.

HISTORICAL CONSULTATIONS: AIMS, AMBITIONS, OBJECTIVES, PRINCIPLES

Individual reports set out the grim reality of socio-economic life in the Upper Calder Valley, [UCVR Master Plan 2004 p13]:

- The Valley's Town Halls (even where not already cut in half) no longer represent the unique combination of civic and merchant power that once created them
- The Valley's Markets, once inextricably entwined with the Valley's rural economy, now sell goods imported from China for less than a pound
- The Valley's Farmers can no longer farm, brought to their knees by globalisation and irrational decisions imposed from afar
- The Valley's Floor has been invaded by large footprint sheds occupying valuable land and choking the Valley's Arteries with their lorries
- The Valley's Road is a dangerous and polluting eyesore; the Valley's River threatens to flood and has long been neglected; the Valley's Railway provides the most basic of services and its Canal, although reopened, still awaits the realisation of its full potential

Nearly twenty years later the "erosion by external forces" listed by the 2004 Master Plan is still visible, though since that was published these forces have been made even worse by the aftereffects of devastating floods, including (re)building works and increased traffic.

Yet reading the reports one is struck by the relentless optimism and positivity of the local population, which is at complete variance with the dystopian image presented above. The historic consultations, as a cumulative exercise, are filled with potential and the drive to look forwards to a future that holds opportunities for all generations in the Valley communities.

One of the observables from treating the historical consultations as a set is the map forward laid out in each of the report's objectives.

This is not a straightforward exercise, in part because not all of the reports adopt similar nomenclatures. This point will be addressed in the Conclusion. Also, due to the focus of each of the reports, not all are oriented to "objectives".

However, for those historical consultations that do provide listings, it is worth re-considering the objectives. We can do this by curating objectives into a single section. This preliminary exercise brings an array of common features into sharper focus.

[2008 Tod TC Devt Brief]:

1.10 The Brief has adopted the following strategic objectives:

- To establish the principle of a mixed-use development on the site, to include the redevelopment of the Health Centre area and Council car parks.
- To create a high quality development, with improved public realm that is appropriate to its context and that preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the Town Centre Conservation Area.
- To create an environment that increases economic activity and footfall in Todmorden Town Centre and increases the retail offer in the town.
- To create better visual and pedestrian linkages between Bramsche Square and Todmorden Town Hall.
- To improve the economy of the town by encouraging developments which will provide a home for new or expanding businesses if demand exists
- To assist the improvement of the indoor and outdoor markets
- To encourage suitable leisure uses
- To encourage development of environmentally friendly schemes as part of wider initiatives already being undertaken in Todmorden

These objectives are reprinted in [Development Brief 2016] [Section 4, p 4]

[UCVR conference] [p4]

- Improve the quality of life of the area and its five key settlements, Walsden, Todmorden, Mytholmroyd and Sowerby Bridge
- Create economically and socially vibrant places
- Establish effective 'Town Teams'
- Boost Economic performance

- Develop ambitious and achievable Town Visions

[Tod NP 2017]

- New development should be of an APPROPRIATE SCALE and QUALITY to the area and its specific location. Large-scale developments are not considered to be appropriate for the NP area, given the nature of the existing built form, landscape considerations, and local topographical factors.
- The Neighbourhood Plan should adopt a positive WELCOMING APPROACH towards new businesses, residents, and visitors by encouraging business start-ups and relocation, identifying land and opportunities for the construction and provision of locally affordable houses of a suitable mix, type and tenure, and ensuring that tourists and occasional visitors are properly catered for.
- The focus of policies in the Neighbourhood Plan should be on PEOPLE as much as PLACES aiming to improve the social, environmental, economic, and physical comfort of residents, employers and visitors alike. Existing strengths, such as the 'Incredible Edible' initiative, should be reinforced, young people encouraged to stay put when they leave school, and local businesses given the opportunity to consolidate and expand wherever possible.
- CONNECTIVITY with people and places elsewhere in Yorkshire and beyond is an essential element of the Neighbourhood Plan strategy and has played a large part in making the area the vibrant place it is today. To avoid becoming a "dormitory" community, enable access to higher level services and facilities, and encourage people, businesses and tourists to visit the area, bus and train services must be retained at least at existing levels - and where possible, improved. Likewise, the canal must continue to be promoted as a visitor attraction of national, if not international, standing

[TIP 2021]

- Redevelop the heart of the town centre to create a vibrant destination which is attractive to visitors and residents alike. It will have high quality, public spaces and facilities, a more diverse range of uses and activity
- To improve the town centre experience and be friendly for walkers, cyclists and people with limited mobility

- To maximise the potential of our cultural and heritage assets
- Build on the strength of the town's arts, music and cultural sectors
- Provide opportunities and modern workspaces for small and medium sized businesses, particularly in the creative sector
- Provide high quality opportunities in education and training as a foundation for a creative, prosperous and more sustainable future
- Grow the visitor economy to become the gateway to the Calder Valley, and to Leeds and Manchester conurbations, with excellent transport links, exceptional outdoor pursuits, outstanding recreational spaces and commercial opportunities
- Deliver environmentally sustainable projects and reduce carbon emissions
- Contribute towards post Covid-19 recover

Competing Narratives

Curating the objectives facilitates the identification of common themes. However, common themes are not solely located in the objectives but in the body of the texts.

The objectives suggest commonality but, on closer reading of the texts themselves, there are “competing narratives”. Although the reports are, in the main, self-contained and do not cross reference each other in substantive ways, the systematic study using the “time-series” approach to assessment reveals issues upon which there are contrasting emphases. This current document highlights some of the most significant competing narratives.

One of the most jarring of these competing narratives is the importance of retail development. Advocating retail development is a feature of agency driven reports [Aspinall; Devt Brief 2008]

This runs counter to the expressed wishes of the population of Todmorden, however, in [Town Plan for Todmorden 2013]. The importance of highlighting this competing narrative is that it is not solely a concern of market traders [Feasibility], it is a viewpoint shared by the wider community.

One of the disturbing aspects of funding criteria, to an outside observer, is that these set out to be exclusionary rather than inclusive. For example, in the [Tod TC Development Brief (2008)], it is stated explicitly that “As one of the aims of the redevelopment is to improve the retail offer by creating modern, larger units within the town, any scheme should have an

element of retail development within it.” (pp15-16). Given the chronological organisation of these historical consultations it is not surprising that traders reacted with such alarm at the “market futures” research [see Markets 2014; see above], for a report advocating competitive developments had already been published, and it carried the imprimatur of Calderdale Council.

Another feature of the systematic reading of the reports as a set is the occasional presence of a concern for future generations. Before opening any of the reports this author assumed that this would have been a dominant theme throughout. Instead, what has been called “brain drain” tops and tails the set of reports:

- “Create an economically and socially vibrant town that will retain the younger generation whose exodus to cities seriously threatens economic diversification, social balance and future sustainability” [UCV Renaissance 2004 p1]
- “seeking to improve the facilities and opportunities available for young people, encouraging them to remain in the area for education, employment and leisure activities” [TNP update 2017, slide 3]



Town Deal Board supporting young people to be engaged

More shall be said about the competing narrative on housing in the Conclusion. What is clear, however, is that the original development brief (2008) stipulates a criterion on housing development, which is responded to in [Aspinall]. However, reading the consultations with residents – not just summaries of these in the reports – there is an emphasis on “appropriate” housing. “Appropriate” housing is a gloss: it means “accessible” housing (single level,

doorways wide enough for wheelchair users, mobility aids) and “affordable” housing, so that the young people of Todmorden are not priced out of the town.

Emergent and Recurrent Themes

The combined approaches of assessment – episodic (treating reports separately) and time-series (treating each report as part of a set of reports) – recover a variety of themes. Some of these themes are recurrent through the set of reports.

- Transport
- Space and land use
- Public space
- Sustainability and environment
- Housing
- Leisure
- Economy and retail
- Tourism
- Markets

However, there are nuances to the analysis of such themes over time. These nuances involve, what becomes of those themes that are mentioned in perfunctory fashion? How much emphasis is given to individual themes? The graphical representation of themes is convenient and helpful, but only up to a point: graphical representations disguise questions that this nuance raises, such as: Is it a valid methodological procedure to report as themes those issues that receive only cursory attention? For example, most of the reports mention aspects of the local economy; however, not all of these aspects are identical, and not all of these are accorded the same prominence. Second, given that this affects the future development of their town: Is it fair to the people of Todmorden to overrepresent themes?

The problem of nuance is to reflect issues without suggesting equivalence.

Accordingly, re-organising the set of historic consultations seems to be appropriate in order to answer the question, What themes are identified by people in town?

In order to reflect priorities, the list of themes identified by people rather than by agencies is not isomorphic. That is, it is marginally different, so it doesn't map onto graphical representation perfectly. Some of the themes are still present – there is remarkable coherence between the findings of all the reports.

However, it is useful to see what the priorities of the people are, in full:

- Housing – affordable
- Housing – accessible
- Transport – bus/rail
- Transport – cycling
- Transport – cars
- Space and land use – car parks
- Space and land use – derelict and unsightly areas
- Markets
- Leisure facilities – improving existing facilities
- Leisure facilities – creating new facilities
- Employment opportunities

Although dated 2013, which in temporal terms is mid-range for the historical consultations, readers are referred to survey results in “Town Plan for Todmorden”. Reading the reports as a set leads to the conclusion that this document is representative of community views. This document makes for interesting reading for, as well as survey results, it includes direct comments from respondents.

A range of pertinent comments is found in Appendix 1. A sample includes the following:

Todmorden:

- 96% of respondents stated that they loved living in Todmorden. They loved ‘its beautiful location’, ‘proximity to other towns and cities’ and its ‘unique character.’

Planning:

- Respondents were most concerned about the derelict sites in the town.

- 'Todmorden has amazing buildings and countryside but sadly the residents are becoming disillusioned by the dereliction and neglect round the centre of an otherwise attractive market town.'
- 'Develop the derelict buildings in the town. They make the town look messy and dirty and won't attract external investment or families to move here'
- Many commented on the need to improve the town centre. 'We need a central area where people can shop/have coffee or a meal/stroll around canal or river. All our facilities are fragmented.'
- Although a need was identified for a limited amount of new housing, respondents thought that housing should only be developed with 'careful consideration to the infrastructure of a small town.'
- 'Too much general housing will spoil the feel of the town and put a strain on infrastructure'

Economy:

- Respondents were particularly concerned about lack of job opportunities in the town.
- Strong views were given on the proposals for additional supermarkets. The majority of respondents (67%) were against the proposals.
- 'We don't need any more supermarkets in the town. We need attractions to boost the footfall through the town'

Community:

- Respondents also felt strongly that the High School needed updating. 'Our High School needs and deserves better facilities, it is very disrespectful to our young people and their teachers to expect them to perform well in such run down facilities, and a huge credit to them that they do.'

Leisure:

- Some felt that 'a climbing/canoeing/walking centre open to all could be very successful, especially if linked to the popular Youth Hostel or other hotels and accommodation.'

Tourism:

- Respondents felt that the canal area should be developed into ‘an area of outstanding beauty for walkers, cyclists, diners, picnickers and having a centred focus.’
- ‘Make more of the canal, pretty it up, add more seating and market it’
- The market, seen by many as the central hub of the town, was also considered important to tourism.
- ‘Promote the market and the lovely scenery to bring in visitors, walkers and shoppers’

Environment:

- Many respondents supported Todmorden’s development as a sustainable town and felt that this should be promoted further.



The historical consultation “Town Plan for Todmorden” is recommended reading. For those interested in the development of Todmorden but who do not have the time to read all of the historical consultations, this is the report to read. Some of the 2013 figures are now out of date, e.g. the price of a single fare bus ticket along Burnley Road. However, the views of the community that it presents and the state of Todmorden within the Calder Valley are remarkably constant.

The significant problem with the “Town Plan for Todmorden” is its organisation: how the report is organised and presented to readers. The most significant material that it contains is “relegated” to Appendix 1 (pp.27-34), which has potential implications for developments informed by its orientation.

The inclusivity of consultation is taken to a new level in the Town Investment Plan (“TIP”) (2021), which proposes to elaborate upon the innovative programme of Dementia Communities by turning Todmorden into a dementia friendly environment. This creative approach dovetails with the promise of historical consultations, to make Todmorden a truly accessible town for visitors and all of its residents.

Markets

When treated as a coherent set of reports [section above], one of the historical consultations can be seen as an ‘outlier’. This is “A Feasibility Report on the Future of Todmorden Markets”, produced by Todmorden Market Futures Steering Group. This report is a repository of significant issues. This document explains why this is an extraordinary report within the set of historic consultations.



Todmorden outdoor market

“A Feasibility Report on the Future of Todmorden Markets” is focused, as its title suggests, on Todmorden Market – both Indoor and Outdoor. This document situates Todmorden Markets in the context of Todmorden’s local economy. Other historic consultations are concerned with particular areas within Todmorden, which include the Markets; but not the Markets per se. Whilst there is a slice of community engagement in the set of historic consultations, this report discusses research taken from a more limited sample for its engagement: market traders and

market customers. Sampling and a single institution under discussion constitute the main outlier qualities of this report.

The Markets are mentioned across the historical consultations. It is clear from [Tod conservation area character appraisal Appendix C p12] that Todmorden Markets is an essential part of the history and heritage of the town. It is evident from the [Feasibility] that these are held in great affection by traders and by customers.

From reading the set of reports it is a puzzle why Todmorden Markets are not given greater prominence. The diversity of the retail offer within the Markets is one of its attractions to visitors [Town Plan for Tod 2013].

In increasingly homogenous retail environment shoppers will travel great distances to towns with market stalls that provide such a different shopping experience.

Indeed, it is because markets provide different shopping experiences that Todmorden Markets are not incompatible with other retail establishments. The author of this report has experience of this point in fieldwork interviews with traders at Kirkgate Market, Leeds and traders who had to relocate from the Corn Exchange, following the bombing of Manchester City Centre (1996). The interaction between traders and customers, the varied retail offer, the proximity of stalls which accentuates the differences between them for customers, and the shopping experience combine. This combination ensures that markets are not direct competitors with supermarkets [planning contexts]

Unfortunately for some market traders, however, such as those with grocery and produce stalls, competitor status is not two-way. Even when they do not pose direct competitor status vis-à-vis supermarkets, fixed outlets undermine the position of market traders.

Contested Spaces

The historic consultations detail a number of spaces within Todmorden that are contested by people. As an inclusive report I have no wish to exacerbate tensions between people. However, it is clear that some regions are being stretched, which causes stress to various groups of people.

[Aspinall Verdi] tension between traffic and pedestrians. Pedestrians will always come off worst in such encounters of course.

[TP 2013, p33] comments: 'Too many cars - will increase with supermarket plans'

There were concerns that 'pavements are too narrow in certain areas e.g. past the waste station towards Todmorden and terraced houses. Dangerous traffic speed makes it difficult for pedestrians to cross the road/cyclists to ride safely.' Some respondents asked for 'traffic calming schemes in all outlying villages.' One respondent commented that it 'can be unpleasant crossing Rochdale Road by Cornholme Arches.' while another stated, 'crossing the road near the Town Hall' is also hazardous. 'Much should be done to improve pedestrian safety in the centre and the approach to villages' 'Burnley Road has cars massively speeding at 60/70 mph on it right by the park, school, leisure centre and local housing with loads of kids – highly dangerous. We have had one fatal accident and one that may have been. We need traffic calming measures before a kid is killed'

Street furniture outside shops is causing evident tensions, between shop owners and passers by. There is a 'big picture' when it comes to street furniture, which is: Does street furniture obstruct access to potential customers – not just for the shop concerned, but for neighbouring shops? When street furniture turns into an obstacle to the generation of income, for the local economy, decisions have to be made.

Pavements are contested spaces for others, not just shop owners and customers: "Some pedestrians were put off by cyclists. They felt that cyclists should 'keep off the footpaths' and that "those who use the towpath should have a bell." [TP 2013, p34] This quote confirms that another contested space is the canal towpath.

Balancing Acts of and for Future Developments

There are a number of balancing acts evident within these historical consultations. "Balancing acts" refers to recurrent themes across the historical consultations but the actions recommended are qualified. In other words, these are subject to perspective – as indicated and expressed by statements of responsibility. These may be summarised as:

- Development – but only in keeping with the context

- Development needs to preserve and/or enhance the character and appearance of Todmorden
- The wants of tourists versus the needs of residents
- The vision of pedestrian friendly space versus the needs of motorists (roads, car parking facilities)

The explicit discussion of visions and plans specific to towns within the Calder Valley disguises tensions that are experienced elsewhere. These may be summarised as:

- The promotion of green policies against the current separation of grocery outlets and residential areas
- The enforced reliance on cars
- Are “emphasising sustainability” and “maintaining a viable local economy” mutually incompatible?

These ‘bread and butter’ issues do not necessarily supersede intangibles such as the “identity” of a town: as historical consultations show, residents are keen to discuss Todmorden and intangibles such as “character”/“identity”. Residents’ common-sense metrics of indefinable issues – “dereliction” and “neglect” – are formulated when discussing visually apparent matters such as car parking, canal banks and access to the canal, and public spaces within Todmorden. To borrow from the metaphors of the Todmorden Plan (2014), such common-sense metrics on dereliction and prosperity are the “warp and weft” of a town’s character, and its residents’ identity.

Access and Accessibility

Todmorden can be accessed via canal, rail and road. Local leaders should be attentive to the impression that those who pass through or pass by receive. Consider, what impression of the town is conveyed at first glance? In practical terms, this means that any attempts to improve access to and from the railway station, for example, should be matched by attempts to improve access to and from the canal.

Greening Todmorden: Planning Contexts and Political Agendas

The urban planning context is a complex of intersecting priorities. These are financial, legal, logistical, and political.

Reports within the historical consultations (particularly, the Feasibility Markets study) acknowledge that funds to make change are difficult to obtain, that there are many and various financial constraints upon sources of funding. Funds and grants to make change are available but these are highly competitive. Applications for funding have to comply with criteria, which set eligibility requirements and council priorities.

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is a piece of legislation that constrains new developments. For Todmorden, these constraints are opportunities: The Act itself changed the laws which govern planning permission and set preferences for developments. Sections underscore the importance of the preservation of individual buildings, and the “desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area” (Section 72, quoted in Aspinall Verdi p19). The desired changes that are expressed in the historic consultations are desirous of enhancements to the characteristics and appearance of specific areas in Todmorden; moreover, there is no suggestion of disturbing listed buildings themselves.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was originally published in 2012, went through various iterations and has been updated in 2021. The NPPF favours sustainable development, goes together with the Planning Policy Guidance (PPG). The NPPF sets out a legal requirement for Councils to devise local plans. The PPG provides more localised, specific guidance than the NPPF, which sets out an overall strategy. The relevant PPG is currently undergoing drafting and is called Calderdale Local Plan.

The Aspinall Verdi (Section 4, pp.24-28) report sets out a variety of technical analyses vis-à-vis land and water quality.

The Todmorden Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2007) sets out a variety of guidelines and procedures for planning and developing within and in proximity to conservation areas. Appendix C provides an overview of the listed buildings (Grades I and II) in the conservation area, as well as a description of other buildings of interest. This appendix is particularly important in determining the “character” of Todmorden town centre: as well as its short descriptions of buildings it provides detail on why these buildings are historically important to the town.

Assessing the historical consultations identifies themes of sustainability and conservation which cohere with the priorities set by the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow (November 2021). Many of the resolutions and outcomes are “upstream” commitments, by which we mean that these have been taken at a Governmental, national level. COP26 recognised that tackling climate change could not be an individual issue – altering individual behaviours on recycling or energy use; nor a national issue, as separate countries are not going to make enough of a difference on their own.

COP26 re-asserts that climate change requires international cooperation.

But what can be done at a local level? Minor but significant changes to the urban landscape can facilitate individual change, such as safer pedestrian and cycling zones. As individual people move from cars to walking and cycling, this would count towards the Government’s commitment to lowering emissions. This is the cumulative effect of facilitating many individuals to make alterations to their lifestyle. Such changes are set out in the historic consultations and have taken on a new, heightened relevance with the signing of COP26 agreements.

Indeed, the residents of Todmorden are ahead of the political curve. The Town Investment Plan (“TIP”) pre-dates COP26 yet the synergies on sustainability between TIP and COP26 are striking.

A benefit of taking action is to claim leadership on COP26 commitments, which will attract further interest in Todmorden.

Politically, the current Administration’s “Levelling Up Agenda” and “Northern Powerhouse” have yet to be translated from aspirations into concrete, i.e. real strategies for Todmorden.

The “Levelling Up Agenda” and “Northern Powerhouse” are compatible with the NPPF in terms of sustainability.

The suggestions for growth and improvement within the set of consultation reports actively seek a coherent Green plan. This plan would involve the creation of jobs in the production of viable public spaces, such as the dismantling of obstacles and opening up of vistas, for the re-integration of River and Canal within the town, the provision of accessible entrances to the towpath, and the establishment of more pedestrian friendly and cycle networks. These all require capital investment, demonstrating that Todmorden is included within the Levelling Up Agenda. The visible improvements and accessibility of facilities will act as a catalyst for further change, attracting businesses and creating further employment opportunities. Among these will be the continued management and maintenance of these sustainable sites.

A green plan for Todmorden is articulated in the recent Town Investment Plan (“TIP”). This plan aligns with the sustainability commitments of Calderdale Council (p.51). This is emphasised throughout the TIP and marks Todmorden out as a local centre for addressing (not just talking about) green issues.

Residents’ determination to lead and act upon sustainability provides a clear example of “the micro within the macro”. The “macro context” is climate change, and what we are going to do about it. The “micro context” is the local level, how communities are responding to achieve nation’s commitments to the international effort.

A further benefit for claiming leadership on sustainability issues, then, is marketing Todmorden as a beacon of the “green agenda”. This in turn will generate further interest in Todmorden.

Some objectives have a dual or latent purpose, i.e. these are win-win. For instance, the ambition to provide a more sustainable transport system is isomorphic or maps onto the ambition to provide increased leisure facilities, e.g. a safe cycle network. Improving access to the waterways encourages canoeing, which helps to improve wellbeing. An increased take-up of canoeing provides business opportunities for the manufacture and sale of wetsuits, etc. In turn, such developments address the “green agenda”, also.

DISCUSSION

This report was written by studying a number of reports on Todmorden in two distinct ways. An 'episodic' reading involves taking each report separately from the others. A 'time-series' approach involves reading these reports as part of a set or sequence. Taking an 'episodic' approach, each of the historic consultations, development briefs, putative projects and town plans are interesting documents in their own right. In part due to the particular relevances of each report, distinct themes are prioritised. Taking a 'time-series' approach, where these individual reports constitute a cohesive 'set', reveals that despite differences in method, perspective and relevance, such distinct themes not only emerge but recur.

That the range of reports are not isomorphic is expectable. That the range of reports contains practitioner relevances as distinct from resident relevances is expectable also.

The systematic assessment of historical consultations suggests that more care and attention could be put into the devising of administrative categories. This would be a benefit to planners and future readers of reports but is necessary at the research design stage. Many of the reports contain a binarism between "residents" and "visitors". This binarism does not work as well as a binarism between "traders" and "customers" (Feasibility). For example, cyclists who use the canal towpath or the Burnley Road may or may not include "residents". However, for those cyclists who are not residents, cycling through Todmorden does not mean that they are "visitors".

It is notable that [Tod Town Centre Development Brief] makes a point of saying "The reopening of the Rochdale Canal has improved the image of the town and encouraged visitors to the area" [1.3]. Yet it is evident, from contemporaneous and subsequent reports, that the promise of such reopening has not yet been capitalised upon. For example, the Todmorden Conservation Area report (2007, p.18) refers to "boundary features" made with "materials such as timber fencing which may not be appropriate or characteristic to the area" and that "detrimentally affect the character of the Conservation Area". Indeed, this is a lament in the Feasibility Study on Markets: "It would be disappointing for this work to result in yet further inaction" (Markets 2014, p.18)

The historical consultations may be authored solely or organisationally. A key distinction is between reports that are official, agency-led; or that are ad hoc, community-led. Statements of responsibility are subjacent to method: the consultative reports document people's views on Todmorden and features of Todmorden. People's views should be paramount when future projects are prioritised.

The Council-led reports emphasise the need for retail space for an improved retail offer within Todmorden, and the need for residential accommodation. The “community’s priorities” may be apparently similar but they are not isomorphic with the Council’s priorities.

This is not to impugn or disparage the excellent, meticulous analytic work that has gone into the Aspinall Verdi report, which is an extremely professional practitioner proposal. However, for all its acuity, it is a response to a development brief that, in key respects, was at variance with the priorities of residents.

The original development brief claims to have been informed by consultation (p.2). There are two methodological points to this: First, information on the weighting of consultation within the selected methods is minimal, which – given the wealth of information provided on other aspects of the process – suggests that the emphasis on consultation was minimal also. Second, the consultative reports are demonstratively based on consultation. From a methodological point of view the transparency of method in the consultative reports, e.g. who was involved in the consultation process, what did consultation involve, what was asked, and what were the responses to questions, is far more encouraging.

The original design brief emphasised the needs for retail space for an improved retail offer within Todmorden, and the need for more residential accommodation. The Aspinall Verdi proposal responds to these criteria for proposals.

Consultations with the Todmorden community also acknowledge the needs for more residential accommodation plus additions to the retail environment. However, the community expresses a more nuanced approach to accommodation.

With regards to more residential accommodation, the community emphasises that accommodation is targeted towards particular user groups: accessible accommodation for those residents with mobility needs; and affordable accommodation to retain the younger generation who have to leave Todmorden to find employment that can keep up with Todmorden house prices.

The Town Investment Plan (“TIP”) goes further, recommending that the affordable and accessible accommodation is net zero carbon accommodation (p.62).

With regards to an improved retail offer, the community emphasises improvements to existing retail facilities such as Todmorden Markets, rather than more supermarkets. Furthermore, the community is more sensitive to problems consequent upon increasing the number of supermarkets: ‘Too many cars – will increase with supermarket plans’ [TP 2013, p33].

CONCLUSION

An observation from reading the reports as a set is that Todmorden, as it currently exists, is a product of its historical development. This may seem trite but, digging deeper into these reports, it is clear that Todmorden's growth over time has been lacking a cogent, coherent strategic vision. The result of this lack of strategy is random parking; busy roads that could have been more sensitive to traffic volume; a lack of traffic management; an urban grain arrived at by accident rather than by design; an overshadowing of statement buildings, such as the Town Hall; the under-exploitation of the River Calder as a defining feature of the centre; the development of buildings that detract from the River and from statement buildings.

This report distinguishes those historical consultations that are agency-led, e.g. practitioner analyses based on predetermined categories and those historical consultations that are community-led. Community consultations are more reliable and valid forms of evidence to base project proposals because these document people's views, rather than agency-led reports that are reflections of administrative categories.

Among the implications of method (or procedure) that we endorse is one which is summarised in STF: results are "credible by consultation" [STF Section 1.02]. It is the act of canvassing users' opinions, and for these to be taken seriously rather than having "top down" preferences imposed upon them, that adds significant value to the consultation processes thus far. As the report goes on to say, these "should be considered as the people's choice, and [...] the community's priorities should be respected" [STF p2].

The Town Investment Plan (2021) draws upon previous consultative engagements, which this current report assesses as valuable accounts for future work. The priorities of TIP are co-extensive with the priorities of previous consultation exercises.

The topography of the Calder Valley makes Todmorden vulnerable to weather events. The resilience of its residents in the face of recurrent flood emergencies has encouraged them to find long-term solutions rather than short-term fixes. This has put them in a unique position regarding the most important "macro" context of them all – the global climate crisis.

The sustainability solutions proposed in the Town Investment Plan (“TIP”) position Todmorden as “the micro within the macro”. The various town plans contained in the historical consultations coalesce in TIP. The sustainability solutions summarised in TIP have two key characteristics: first, they anticipate national commitments that would be made later at COP26; second, they demonstrate how national commitments and legal obligations can be realised at a local level.



Todmorden Town Deal Local Experts Panel – Sustainability

It is because each nation’s commitments will, of necessity, involve heavy lifting by community based projects that this report suggests Todmorden residents have been ahead of the political curve. TIP pre-dates COP26 yet the synergies on sustainability between TIP and COP26 are highly significant. Todmorden already has a coherent town plan that supports the UK COP26 obligations.

Furthermore, Todmorden can lead upon the local micro within the national macro context through the proposals in TIP. If these projects receive funding these will be seen as a model for the possible: how individual communities can fight towards a better tomorrow, for this and future generations.



Todmorden Town Deal / Town Investment Plan – Open Day, April 2022

A comprehensive report to assess the outcomes of historical consultations in Todmorden

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