

The Community Newsletter of TotSoc - the Totnes and District Society

BALTIC WHARF DECISION

Paul Bennett

Notwithstanding the recommendation by SHDC planning officers to approve this application, planning committee members exercised their independence and voted against it. All the Totnes members spoke against the proposal and with a background of hostility from members of the public packing the meeting secured sufficient support from other councillors to defeat the recommendation.

Whilst there is widespread support for the redevelopment of the site for mixed uses there has also been criticism of what is perceived as an over provision of residential units with particularly adverse consequences for traffic congestion within the town. Concern has also been expressed regarding the height and massing of buildings.

Over the past few months, community representatives (including TotSoc members) have been meeting with TQ9 seeking to narrow the gap between community aspirations and the profitability requirements of the developer. At the time of the planning meeting to determine the application it had not been possible to narrow the gap to a point where community opposition could be dropped. However we have offered to continue to work with TQ9 on the outstanding issues. Paramount amongst the community objectives is to achieve a reduction in residential units together with schemes to mitigate the impact of traffic generation. So far as residential units are concerned we appear to have the support of SHDC Forward Planning (if not the development control officers!) in that the proposal put forward for Baltic Wharf and approved at December's full Council Meeting envisaged 150 housing units rather than the "up to" 250 units proposed by TQ9 and supported by SHDC development control.

On traffic issues we have met with transport planners of

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Devon County Council (as the highway authority). DCC has made it quite clear that there are no major road schemes envisaged for the area within the foreseeable future. Any amelioration of traffic impact will therefore be down to traffic management schemes and TQ9 have expressed willingness to co-operate in the formulation if these. The problem is that this kind of planning is in its infancy and unlike road schemes where the outcome can be accurately measured in advance this is not the case with traffic management because sufficient experience has not yet been gained.

TQ9 have now said that they will be putting forward a revised scheme, which they believe will ameliorate community concerns. Further meetings are currently

being held with TQ9 and additionally SHDC are proposing the setting up of a Community Consultative Forum for major sites such as Baltic Wharf to provide a mechanism for discussion between site owners and their professional team with representatives of the local community.

Baltic Wharf because of its size and situation provides a wonderful opportunity to make a truly fine contribution to Totnes from the 21st century in architectural terms. I am confident that TQ9 and its architects share this aspiration and it is incumbent on all of us to work to achieve it.

TOTNES TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT FORUM

Louis Victory

The Forum aims to be a unifying force for discussion and debate on issues related to traffic and transport in the Totnes and district community. Meetings are public and membership is open to everyone. Local politicians attend regularly, and many special interest groups are represented such as cyclists and transport operators. The Forum is an affiliated working group of both Totnes and District Community Strategy Group and Transition Town Totnes.

Topics for debate are many and various, ranging from the management of roadworks which impact on local trade, right through to discussions about the transport infrastructure needed to accommodate housing and employment growth over the next couple of decades.

Clearly such issues relate closely to the interests of TotSoc, which is represented on the Forum by several of our Committee members. Our concerns about 'quality of place' are often reflected, for instance in debates about how to improve the environment for pedestrians who are hard pressed by heavy traffic in the historic core of the town. Our amazing collection of fine listed buildings is also threatened by vibration and pollution from heavy traffic, and its visual context has to be protected from insensitive highway signage.

Totnes and District Preservation Trust is also represented on the Forum, and has over many

years given intelligent thought to how improvements in the 'public realm' relate to traffic management issues. It has developed masterplans which consider the whole context of traffic circulating through and into Totnes, relating this to how public spaces and pedestrian movement can work better.

The Forum has recently set up a Strategy Group to bring together all the thinking on transportation issues which has been carried out over the last couple of decades in Totnes; it aims to synthesise the ideas and put forward options for public consultation which could at last give us a proper transport infrastructure context for future change and growth. TotSoc will be a significant contributor to this work.

Collaborative working with the County Council – our Highways Authority – is bearing fruit in several important ways. Their Transport Policy manager spoke to the Forum recently, and as a result it is hoped Totnes may be a 'market town demonstrator project' in developing Devon's Local Transport Plan. There is also the prospect of Totnes being assisted to devise an innovative Green Travel Plan. Last but not least, discussions are underway with the County about current proposals to improve the traffic environment in our town centre.

The profile of local transportation issues was recently raised significantly when the Forum hosted a hustings meeting for prospective Parliamentary Candidates.

To visit the Forum's website, go to <http://totnes.transitionnetwork.org/transport/home>

Totnes Treasures - 2

An occasional series by Sue Bennett

“Find a niche and know your customers”.

This, in Andy Garner’s, words, just about sums up his and his wife Lindsay’s modus operandi for their two businesses. He is co-owner with his partner Chris Hatch of “Totnes TV and Electrical” which is situated just off The Narrows at 103d High Street. Lindsay also has an office here from which she runs her travel business.

Andy, who hails from Torquay, trained as a T.V engineer at Plymouth College and came to work in Totnes in 1983 for Aubrey Davies who owned C.H. Stoyles electrical store at 95 High Street. Aubrey retired in 1989/90 and sold the business. Unfortunately the new owner only lasted two years and Andy was made redundant. But being enterprising and resourceful he started his own business in premises now known as “Revival”, moving from there to his present location in 1999. His customers are loyal and long-term and appreciate the efficient, friendly and trustworthy service he offers. The business has evolved over the years and is now NICEIC registered. This means that apart from TV sales, household repairs and aerial installations they now carry out electrical inspections and rewires.

Andy is a well known and popular figure in the town and an active member of the Chamber of Commerce. For the last ten years he and one or two others have volunteered, free of charge, to put up the Christmas lights which festoon the High Street and The Narrows. The Chamber has also been responsible for the hugely successful late night Christmas shopping evenings and put the town on the national map of the best Christmas shopping, although he acknowledges that the town has many other claims to fame!

Andy is passionately involved in the traffic/pedestrianisation debate. Having worked and had a business in the town for over 25 years he has seen the effect that road closure has had on trade. This happened when the road was closed one day a week for 8 months, after the Eastgate fire and at various other times. Reportedly during these times there was a

downturn in some businesses of between 25-30% and whilst sympathetic to the needs of pedestrians he feels that we are lucky to live in such a vibrant town, the envy of many other towns and villages. The hustle and bustle of Totnes, particularly on market days shows how important it is to keep the flow of traffic moving. He fully supports the “Share our Space” campaign and believes that this will be a huge step forward for the town. Others of course will disagree and as we all know the debate is on-going and fiercely contested.

Lindsay, born in Paignton, started her working life at 16 on an -in-house travel training scheme in Torquay in the late 1970s and learned about the travel industry on the job. She later moved to Bath and managed an independent agency there. She moved back down to Devon, married and had a career break to bring up her children. After her divorce she returned to work and after a few years joined Bakers Dolphin Travel Agency in Totnes which is now First Choice.

Whilst there she met Andy when he came to carry out electrical repairs in the shop, and after a period of courtship, they married. When Andy moved into his new premises in 103d High Street, Lindsay was by then working for Travel Counselors PLC and she set up an office in Andy’s shop where she still works. The company started in 1994 with 5 independent counselors, all home workers, and is now 800 strong in the UK with home workers all over the world. They specialise in tailor-made holidays which Lindsay thinks is the way forward in the travel business although she still has customers who like her to arrange package holidays for them. The company is fully bonded so clients are financially protected. Lindsay clearly enjoys her work: her hours are certainly not just 9 to 5; she also works from home and it is not that unusual, she says, for clients to phone for help in the middle of the night! One client rang her at 2 o’clock in the morning, whilst drinking cocktails on the beach on the other side of the world, forgetting the time difference - probably due to

too many cocktails - to thank her for arranging such a wonderful holiday!

Andy and Lindsay offer a combination of services and skills under one roof making their

business premises a unique Totnes “two-stop-shop”. The idea of popping in to pick up a few light bulbs and treating oneself to a tailor-made holiday at the same time is certainly appealing!

Progress in the Leechwell Garden

David Mitchell

Since the last issue of Contact quite a lot has happened in the Leechwell Garden. The Leechwell Garden Association (LGA) has been busy preparing an application for a £50,000 grant from the Community Spaces to supplement the funds provided by MIDAS and SHDC. The latter will provide the basic infrastructure and the additional money will pay for benches, play structures, a pergola and the main gate as well as further planting. So far the application has had Stage 1 approval and the LGA is preparing its Stage 2 submission which it is hoped will be approved by sometime in this summer.

Meanwhile South West Highways (the contractors appointed by SHDC to carry out Phase 1 - the infrastructure work) have been on site since February 1st and are expected to complete their work by the end of March. As you can see from the picture below the surrounding dry stone walls, devon banks and fencing is in place and much of the pathways have been laid

out. They've also been busy constructing the two pools surrounded by large boulders that form the two new 'water features' in the garden. The initial planting of trees and shrubs will soon take place. The picture below shows how the garden looked in mid-March.

Assuming the application for a supplementary grant is successful, Phase 2 should be completed by the autumn and the garden will at last be open for visitors (though only on special 'visiting days' until the plantings have taken proper root).

The scheduled "immersion pool" is currently fenced off and will remain so for some time. An investigation by Exeter Archaeology is about to take place and the LGA hopes to apply for another Lottery Grant to cover the work to repair both the pool and the nearby Leechwell.

For more information about the Association and photos showing the work in progress, visit the LGA website at <http://leechwellgarden.org.uk>



Book Review

John Keleher

Kirsten Levine "From Baltic Sea to Baltic Wharf: a History of Reeves' Timber Yard, Totnes. 1891-1995".

(91pp.) Totnes Heritage Group (2009.) £5

Crucial to any community's employment, when a community loses a major, or even worse its sole, source of employment, and it isn't replaced by something else - as in the case of some mining villages - the impact upon that community can be massive. The part played by an employer in a community is obviously pretty important. So with this in mind as part of a wider story, the history of the Reeves timber yard, over a period of a century, has been recorded by Kirsten Lavine in this little volume.

Drawing upon the oral and written accounts of the experiences of about thirty former employees and associates of the company Ms Lavine sets about her task. In about ninety pages we learn of how the company had originally been set up at the end of the nineteenth century by FJ; how timber was brought up the Dart; how it was transported on land; how it was worked and treated in the yard. By all accounts it must have been a pretty good firm to work for, and a pretty good firm to do business with as well.

In the early days the timber was used on the housing developments that were taking place in the Bay area, and in World War 2 the company played its part by building wooden mine sweepers at Baltic Wharf - four hundred of them, in fact. But it was after the war that the big expansion in the firm took place, and by the 70s it was the biggest timber and builders' merchant in the region, with over forty branches. This was indeed the Golden Age: according to one of the informants Reeves had employed over 300 people in Totnes, and together with Unigate and the Harris Bacon Factory accounted for more than three quarters of the workforce in the town. Apparently there were even some people who referred to the

place as 'Reeves Town'!! Since its inception there had always been a strong community awareness as far as the firm was concerned: FJ himself had been Mayor way back in 1909; its own social club was set up in the Sixties; there were instances of three generations of a family being employed by Reeves; year after year the company was involved in the town carnival; on a part-time basis the local fire brigade was recruited largely from the Reeves workforce.

But with the retirement of FJ's two sons, Mr Arthur (1969) and Mr George (1973), and the latter's being quickly followed by the company being taken over by Thomas Tilling, the firm gradually lost its local, dynastic, family-like 'feel'. In 1984, along with others in the group, the Reeves timber business was taken over by British Tyre and Rubber - for whom, as the name suggests - timber was not a core business. The following decade saw a gradual decline in economic activity and, as a consequence, in the number of people on the payroll. The last timber ship came to Totnes in 1993, and the timber yard finally wound up at the end of the 1994/5 financial year. However, that's not the end of the story. Today Totnes does not seem to be as dependent on single major employers as it had been in the past, and there are plans afoot for the further development of Baltic Wharf. But that's another story - and we all know about that, don't we?

This is a highly readable book, with lots of photographs - usually at least one per page. These are mostly from the Image Bank, but some are also from private collections. The story of the timber yard is illustrated and brought to life by these images and by the words of Ms Lavine's informants, while her own role is that of organiser, link, and summariser. The whole thing is well put together and attractively presented. Indeed, the Heritage Group along with one particular Reeves, are to be congratulated for driving the project along. It's well worth a fiver.

TOTNES AT THE CROSSROADS - WHERE TO NOW?

An edited summary of the talk given by Charles Fox to the TotSoc AGM on 26 November 2009

Although the three settlements of Dartington, Totnes and Bridgetown had separate origins, over the years they have become inextricably interlinked and are now perceived (particularly externally) as having a common identity. The commonality of the settlement has to be recognised in planning for its future.

I would argue that there is urgent need for the preparation of an integrated, long-term development plan for the town, grounded in sustainable principles of delivery, use and maintenance. The key issues to be addressed relate to movement, habitation, food production, work, education/recreation.

As a consequence of Totnes' crossroads location, through traffic on the trunk routes adds significantly to pressures on the quality of life and health of residents and visitors alike. The 'rat-runs' through the town centre are dangerous and polluting and the physical damage to the Town's historic fabric, together with the disruption to the enjoyment of the potential ambience of the Conservation Area are detrimental to the local economy, as they diminish the footfall potential for local businesses. Furthermore, the unrestricted access for private and delivery/collection vehicles further reinforce the traffic domination of the town centre. The weakness of the connection between the railway station, the main bus stops, long-term car-parks and other visitor entry points (and the predominance of short-term car-park spaces) need to be addressed in an integrated, strategic transport plan.

Until recently, the identification of potential housing sites was not adequate to meet the demand. The ongoing Development plan process places emphasis only on meeting the demand in terms of total numbers of dwellings at notional densities. In addition, development briefs need to be prepared by the authorities which lay out specific detailed design criteria for each potential site. Also specific guidance needs

to be given to potential developers on ways in which 'local distinctiveness' may be achieved.

The continued physical growth of the Town is being planned for. Such growth could be beneficial if it is undertaken in a properly integrated manner but the community must extract the maximum benefit which an increased size and critical mass can bring in terms of strengthened identity, political influence, economic resources, market variety and the provision of enhanced facilities and services.

Three major issues confront the Town:

1. The effect of growth of Torbay and Plymouth on traffic on the route which connects them and which runs through the heart of the Town.
2. The need to protect and enhance the Town's prime asset, the nationally important collection of architecture and its setting within the Conservation Area.
3. The pressures on land, access to facilities, utilities, etc., associated with growth

Perhaps provision should now be made (after 50 years since it was first mooted) for the possible construction of a new trunk road bypass to the town centre? Such a route should be designed so as to:

- Allow through traffic, as far as possible, to be removed from local distributor roads;
- Allow choice of access points to different parts of the Town;
- Remove through traffic from the entrances to KEVICC and the new primary schools at Ashburton Road and Shinnars's Bridge;
- Open up possibilities for fully effective and realistic traffic management in the Conservation Area;
- Open up land potentially for development of housing and other related uses and for employment.

The plan on the next page shows how this might

be done. However, it must be borne in mind that the protection of the corridor of land required, on the one hand:

- could blight 'open' and already 'developed' land;
- present a difficult highway design problem, particularly around the river and railway cross points;
- involve major new bridge construction.

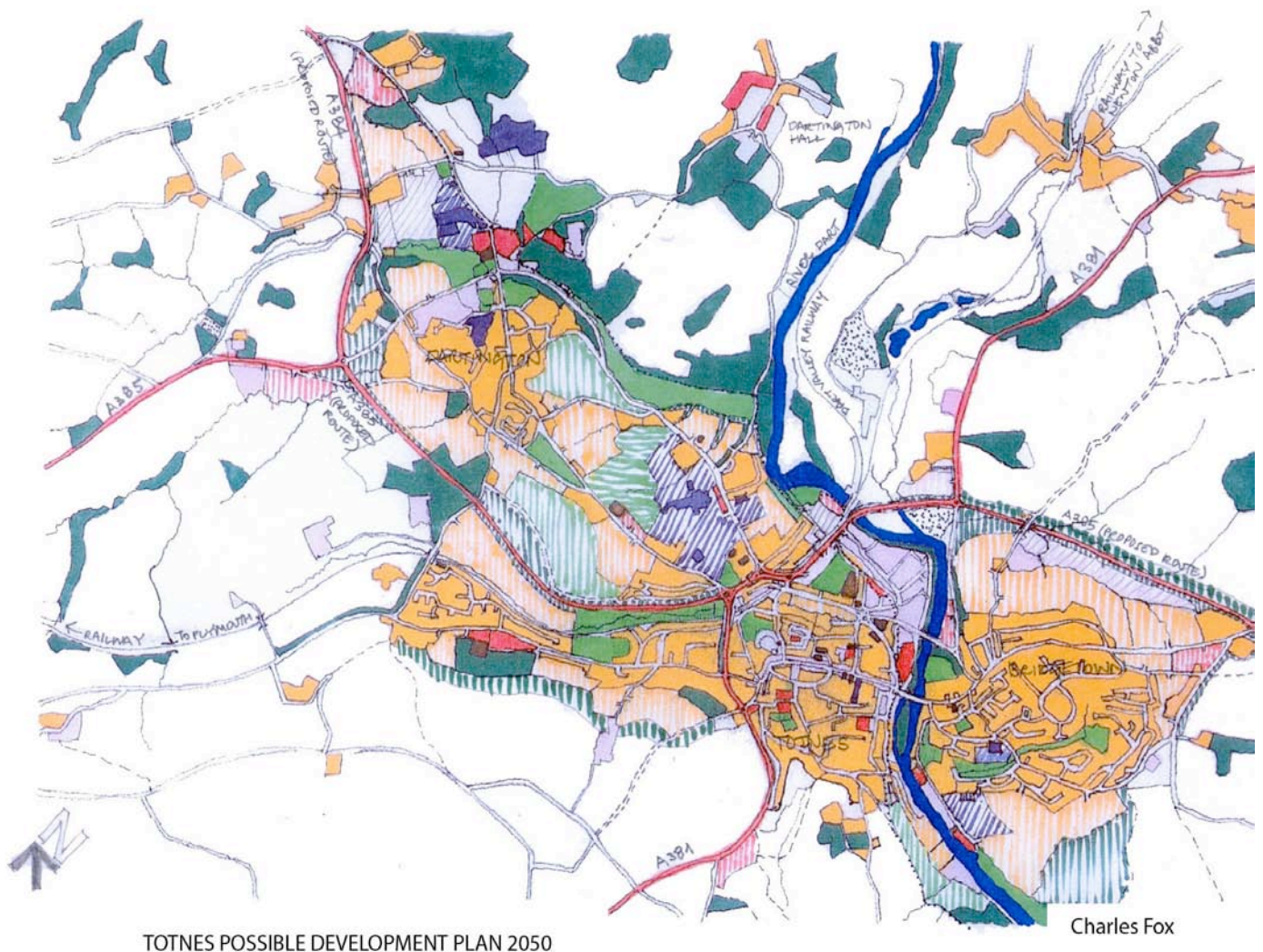
On the other hand:

- it could provide alternative and improved to such areas as the railway station (allowir be developed as a high-quality business and sub-region transport hub;
- besides providing an improved link between Torbay and Plymouth (of value to

the regional economy) it would improve access to the Babbage Road estate;

- it would also serve traffic between Newton Abbot and the South Hams which currently must negotiate and therefore add congestion to Station Road.
- park and ride provision could be located at the major 'gateways' on the trunk roads in order to discouraged private car access to the town centre.

The question to be addressed is *not* 'Can growth and change be curtailed (or even prevented)? - the NIMBY approach; but rather 'How can we develop a robust and flexible strategy for growth (*and improvement*) which will protect our quality of life whilst enhancing the opportunities locally for young people.



A Plea from the Secretary

It would help us enormously if we had current email addresses for our members. If you think we don't have yours, please send an email to me at paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com

The TotSoc Committee

The current TotSoc Committee Members are:

Judy Westacott	chair	cldr.westacott@southhams.gov.uk
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Joining TotSoc

Please complete the form below and send it to:

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For Standing Orders, TotSoc's Bank Details are:

Account Name: **TotSoc**
Sort Code: **20 60 88** Acct No. **50878642**
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I have arranged for my bank to pay annually by STANDING ORDER	
I confirm that I pay income tax and am willing for TotSoc to reclaim GIFT AID on my donations annually	