

The Community Newsletter of TotSoc - the Totnes and District Society

Totnes Development Plan Approved

Jill Tomalin

A 17% increase in population in Totnes is now likely over the next 15 years, as sites for 658 homes and 4.4 hectares of new employment land have been approved by Government Inspectors, and the Development Plan (DPD) adopted by the District Council in February. These are momentous decisions which will shape the development of Totnes for many years to come.

So how did we arrive at this point?

SHDC has evidence to show that the South Hams-wide need for housing (particularly affordable housing) is greatest in Totnes; our location near the A38 makes Totnes the preferred place for employment land. Faced with this in 2007, local groups including TotSoc formed the Housing and Built Environment Forum under the aegis of the Community Strategy Group to coordinate a response to the DPD. Along with the Town Council, we accepted these requirements as both real and inevitable, and have pushed since then for a long-term strategic master plan to be developed for the town, trying to ensure that the "least bad" sites are chosen, and highlighting the infrastructure needed to support such development. At times, it has felt like a hard slog!

- Like many local groups, TotSoc responded to the first DPD consultation in 2007 and contributed to the Joint Community Response coordinated by the Town Council and the Strategy Group;
- About 20 local people participated on a Community Focus Group in 2008 (only for SHDC to decide to produce one submission for the whole District instead);

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- An unsuccessful community initiative to develop a full master plan for the town later in 2008 led to eight SHDC consultation days in June 2009 – about 30 local people attended the Totnes day;
- Spring 2010 saw us all respond once more to new DPD proposals and the creation of a second Joint Community Response; and
- Finally, in November 2010, Cllr Tony Whitty and myself participated in three days of the Inspection - with much support from Louis Victory and Kate Wilson (of Friends of the Earth), and from Dave Mitchell on the Southern Area.

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What did we achieve?

The 2007 Joint Response undoubtedly made the District Council sit up and take notice. We saw significant changes between the 2007 and 2010 proposals, which reflected the local views consistently expressed - development at Bidwell in Dartington was abandoned; brown field sites were given new priority over green field sites; the "Vision for Totnes" was developed; and the number of homes is fewer than had been anticipated back in 2007, as is the new land identified for employment. The Inspector removed Borough Park from the DPD and, although we failed to secure a full Master Plan for Totnes, it has been agreed that a master plan will be developed for the sites in the north east quadrant of the town.

These things may have happened without a joint response, of course. But we can say with confidence that our joint approach ensured a strong local input into the 2009 consultation day. And, in the absence of any promotion by SHDC, we ensured the 2010 DPD consultation was publicised and discussed, setting up an exhibition and an open meeting in the Civic Hall to support this. Elsewhere in the District, there remains frustration at the lack of awareness and effective community input into the DPD plans.

And what comes next?

There are encouraging signs that some developers, landowners and the County and District Councils better recognise the need to engage with local people. A new initiative by DCC to develop sustainable travel plans starts with four open workshops in March, and will involve ongoing community liaison via the Traffic and Transport Forum. Local people will be fully involved in the master planning exercises for the northwest part of the town, Riverside in Bridgetown and the Market Square/Central area.

We need to develop our networks and widen participation. Housing and Built Environment Forum members recognise that TotSoc has a particular interest, and indeed expertise, in planning issues, and have agreed that TotSoc will monitor developments and alert the wider network as required. We hope that, working alongside local Councillors at all levels, we can expand this network to provide an effective channel of communication with planners and developers, and a context in which community voices can be heard.

Jill Tomalin, Community Strategy Group Chair, and TotSoc member

The Localism Bill – is Totnes ahead of its time?

Paul Bennett

Whatever the merits of this Bill, which has attracted strong and differing views, it is a striking proposal for reform and change on a scale not seen for a very long time. Fundamental to the planning reforms is the proposal for 'neighbourhood planning' enabling neighbourhoods to draw up their own development plans (NDPs) thus shifting power away from planning officers and elected representatives.

Who will prepare these NDPs? The key to this is the emergence of Town and Parish councils as the anointed localism vehicle to carry these neighbourhood plans forward. But whilst the Bill is long on aspiration it is extremely short on providing the resources to enable these councils either to prepare these plans or

implement them.

Localism has been with us in Totnes for many years but expressed as community involvement, a prime example being the Southern Area development where SOS (Save our space) mutated to DOS (Design our space): the community collaborating with South Hams Council resulting in an award winning scheme.

What is alarming is the thought of Totnes Town Council having planning powers devolved to it without the necessary funding to manage development control functions, particularly so in a town having a greater number of listed buildings than any other of similar size

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Judy Westacott

Hello everyone. Christmas seems such a long time ago now and, like me, no doubt you are all wondering what 2011 has in store for you and the Society.

Now the Local Development has been finalised, developers will be keen to put forward applications for most, if not all, of the development sites approved. Some already started discussions with the District Council before the Inspector's decision has been notified! Baltic Wharf has, as I am sure you are aware, obtained outline planning permission for that site. I suspect that our Society Planning subcommittee will be kept very busy this year.

There is talk that there will be a 'shake up' of the planning process, with more decisions being made locally. Whilst there is merit in that, I doubt that, without extensive training, Town and Parish Councils would be able to cope with, and implement, complex legislation, government guidance and local policies.

There is a real need for affordable housing in Totnes and the surrounding villages but the infrastructure has to be in place to support it. The South West has the highest proportion of people living in the countryside and a high proportion of them think that local families are being priced out of the housing market.

In addition the number of second homes is nearly double the national average. Government spending cuts are likely to lead to a reduction in the funding for Housing Associations, who may need to offer some open market housing in order to secure affordable homes.

When the District Council transferred housing stock to Tor Homes it received £40M. Of that sum approximately £10M was

used to make the Council debt-free. The remainder went into the overall capital 'pot' and, over the past 11 years, capital expenditure on housing has ranged from purchasing accommodation to provide temporary housing for the homeless, the provision of new housing in partnership with Housing Associations and on the renovation and adaptation of the existing housing stock.

Locally, funds have been allocated to the Redworth site (currently being developed by Shire Homes) and to Culverdale (being developed by Tor Homes).

There is a new scheme, Village Housing Initiative, which will reduce the reliance on public funds and will enable small-scale development to take place in order to provide homes for local people. The scheme allows small-scale development of affordable housing in rural communities on sites which may not otherwise have been allocated for housing.

Priority will be given to residents in need of affordable housing and those employed in the village – e.g. primary school teachers – which, in turn, helps local communities to maintain their sustainability and vitality.

Planning applications have already been discussed at the District Council for two Totnes sites prior to the outcome of the Local Development Plan but, as yet, no formal approach has been made. TotSoc will be taking a keen interest in any such developments and monitoring the number of affordable houses included, and the effect on traffic and local infrastructure.

If there are any points that you would like to make, or questions you would like to ask, please contact Paul Bennett (or me).

TotSoc Tour of Darting Primary School

John Keleher



A lot of people see them as they drive or walk past, but one day in early October 2010 about twenty or so TOTSOC members had a guided trip round them. I refer of course, to the buildings which make up the new Dartington Primary School (DPS), and to the time when the twenty or so met in the sunshine outside the school after all the kids had gone home, to be shown round by Jill Mahon, the head-teacher.

The first thing to say about these pods (as they're known) is that they were built with a number of things in mind. One of these is that the new DPS should be as ecologically and environmentally friendly as possible. For example, rainwater is caught and stored and then used to flush the loos. Solar panels produce electricity but it's only after a year or so that the school will be able to accurately tell how much/little they have to rely on the grid. (My guess - for what it's worth - is very little if at all!) As you stand at Reception there's a display telling you how much electricity the school is producing at that very minute, and how much it is using! And the source for the under-floor heating is the

outside air which is sucked in and somehow (I'm not taking questions on this, but Jim Carfrae understands it) it turns cold air into warm air. I was told it's a bit like a fridge in reverse, but then I don't understand how a fridge works. The windows do what all good windows do i.e. let in light, but they are so cleverly slanted that there is never any glare. The acoustics of the pods are designed so that outside noise is absolutely minimal, while internal acoustic beams and panelling ensure that sound produced within each of the four pods stays there and doesn't disturb other areas. The buildings themselves, as anyone who has seen them knows, are made entirely of wood. This wood is spruce harvested from sustainable forests in Switzerland where the timber walls were prefabricated. The parts of the building were then transported to the school site and slotted into place. When each building was completed it was sealed and then the outside covered in locally sourced sweet chestnut slats.

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Each of the four pods is devoted to a specific purpose, and is further divided into specific areas/rooms. One of the pods houses the staff areas, administration, and the hall, which doubles (should it be trebles?) as (a) a dining area complete with kitchens, (b) an assembly area, and (c) a gym. Another is given over to Early Years Foundation Stage, covering children from three to five age (in the Nursery and Reception). The third pod is for children at Key Stage One: age range roughly 5, 6, 7; three teachers; three teaching areas. The Key Stage Two children -the 8, 9, 10 and possibly the occasional 11 year-old - occupy the fourth pod with six teaching areas and six teachers.

I was also struck by the fact that each pod has its own recreation/outdoor area (You could see people itching to get in there and let themselves go!) and also by the fact that there is no toilet block in the school. Why not? Because each classroom has its own loo (so children tend to only go to the loo when they do want to go to the loo). Each is a unisex loo, and apparently the girls give the boys a rough time if they don't lift the seat. This is a good example of how environmental design impacts upon social behaviour! But what really impressed me, in addition to the people we met who actually work there, were the teaching areas. No serried ranks of desks; no teacher's desk (often elevated on a podium) at the front establishing the fact that that was

the fount from whence sprang the knowledge which had to be poured into the heads of us lot seated in the desks; no blackboard with sir's scruffy handwriting on, which we had to copy down. Instead the furniture is flexible. For example, table heights can be adjusted depending on whether children want to kneel, sit or stand. The teacher is in there among the children, not remote and distant. You can write on the walls, which are made of 'special stuff' so that it can easily be erased. And another interesting feature is the fact that the only material on the walls is what the children are currently learning, in contrast to those pictures and charts that get stuck on the wall and stay there long enough to become wallpaper. State-of-the-art electronic white boards are a feature of all the rooms. Little wonder that one of our group said he would love to go back to school - there!

There is a symbiotic relationship between what children learn (curriculum); how children learn (methodology) and where children learn (school buildings). Learning is a process, a journey and it could just be that DPS, where the environment figures large, is on the right track in bringing up the next generation. Hopefully, they will do a better job than we seem to have done.

Totnes Treasures 3 – Food For Thought

An occasional series by Sue Bennett

"Food For Thought" is the aptly named deli owned and managed by Terri and Don Butler. Their first venture; they acquired the premises on The Plains and started up the business in 1989. Soon Don was proving and baking bread and croissants in the shop, using dough mixtures imported from France: this became very popular and, when other businesses asked him to make bread for them he moved the operation out to Ipplepen as he needed extra space.

This enterprise quickly expanded to include pasties and pies which were bought locally and cooked by Don. Terri, who has an HCIMA in Hotels & Catering, is very much "front of house" in the deli, selling a huge variety of goodies: breads, pasties, cakes, delicious sandwiches to order, pies, local ice cream, pates, cheeses, creams, drinks and a whole lot more. The emphasis is on small local producers thus she is able to keep a sharp eye on quality and shrink the food miles to a minimum.

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I have a weakness for the chocolate fudge cake particularly and succulent slices of her delicious whole cooked hams and the unusual and wacky sandwich fillings!

Terri employs a staff of 8, all part-timers: 2 who start in the wee small hours prepping the sandwiches and getting things ready for the morning, 3 van drivers and 3 assistants in the shop. The vans go out each day with a range of lunch products, selling to local businesses, covering a wide area including, of course, the whole of Totnes as well as Dartington, Newton Abbot and Paignton.

Trade has changed over the years and like every other business in the town Terri is affected by the recession, the knotty and

contentious problem of paid parking and the loss of Dartington Arts students. However, she is optimistic for the long-term future of the business although maybe not in the next year or so.

I asked her what she thinks makes for a successful business: social interaction with her customers is very important and that's what small, local shops are all about and where they score heavily over the supermarkets. A professional approach is also vital: too many people set up in business without a business plan or a proper assessment of the market. As Terri and Don have been in their deli for 22 years they clearly have got a lot of things right. Long may they continue to trade!

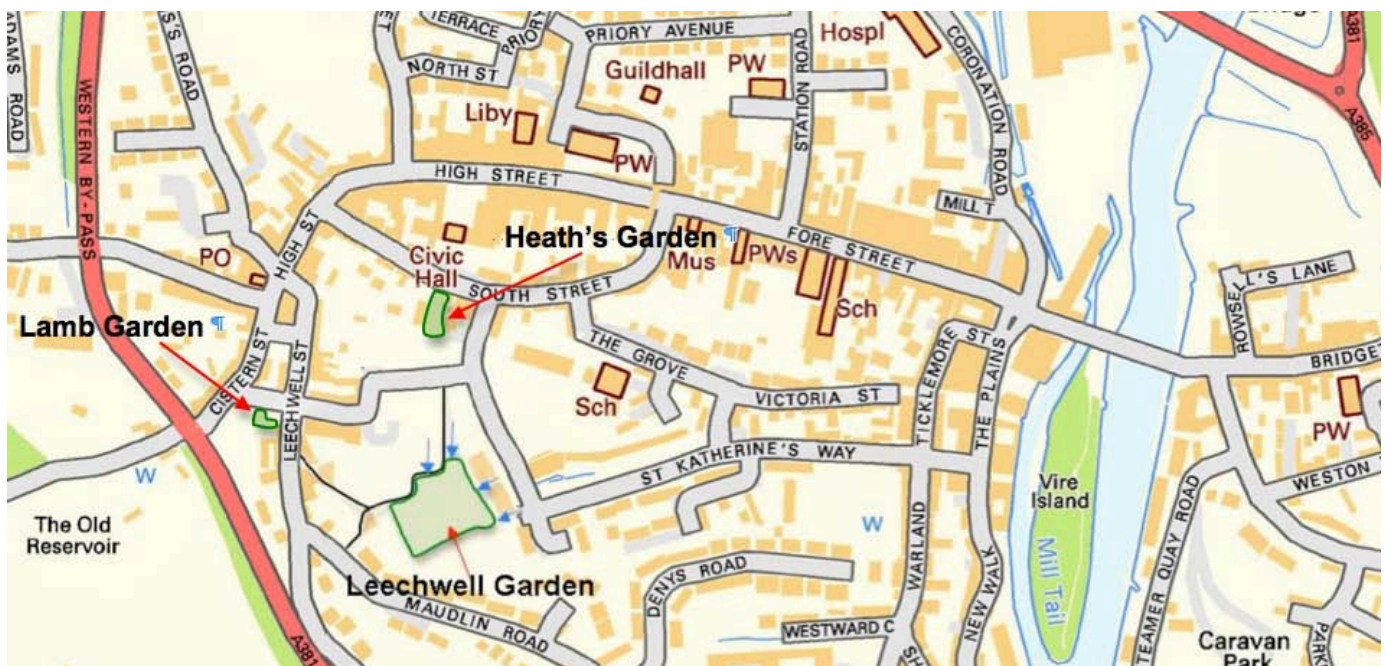
The Three New Public Open Spaces

Dave Mitchell

Over the course of the last six months, three new public open spaces have appeared in Totnes. All are located within the Southern Area of Totnes. In October 2010, the Leechwell Garden was opened by Tony Whitty, Mayor of Totnes. In December 2010 Heath's Garden, the brainchild of Charles Fox and Anthony

Harrison was opened. Finally, in February 2011, Sarah Wollaston, MP for Totnes, opened the Totnes Healthy Futures Lamb Garden.

On the next page, Judy Westacott writes about the history of the Southern Area.



A Plea from the Secretary

Postage is very expensive and to write to all members costs nearly £50, whereas emails are free. It is also a convenient and quick way for us to keep in touch with members. It is important for us to build up members' email addresses and quite a few have already sent me yours. However, if you have not already done so, please email me at:

paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com

Gardens Galore!

[Judy Westacott](#)

During the past year three new gardens have been created in the heart of Totnes (see map on page 6). A lot of work has gone into ensuring that they are both traditional and innovative; and both have come about as a result of organisations working in partnership. I'm referring to the Leechwell, Lamb and Heath Gardens, all situated in the southern area of Totnes, south of the Civic Hall.

Most of you will have visited, or walked through them, and I thought you might be interested in knowing the history of the sites. During the mid-19th century Leechwell Lane (which led from the southern town wall to the ancient Leechwell and beyond) and the surrounding area was given over to gardens, orchards, market gardens and a few houses. It was only during the latter part of the 20th century that roads, car parks and modern housing changed that hitherto productive area into an uninspiring edge to the conservation area.

The occupations of the inhabitants in 1841 were many and varied – including a glove cutter, servants, saddler, tailor's apprentice, coachbuilder and wool comber.

One area was known as Tripe Alley, which was an alternative name for Leechwell Lane, due it was said, to the tripe dressers who once lived there. There was also a slaughterhouse in the lane – there were 5 in Totnes in 1849 – which handled the pigs, sheep and cows from the nearby sheep and cattle markets. In 1850 there were 12 Totnes butchers listed in White's Directory. So farming was an important business.

A sanitation report of 1849 states "*In Leechwell Lane there are various open gutters and nuisances connected with Mr Taylor's orchard, and an orchard below it, across which filth of numerous privies finds its way. And of a slaughterhouse in nearby South Street, the stench of which is beyond everything and is at times of the most noisome description*".

Not a very pleasant location by all accounts and nothing like the pleasant open spaces that are there today. That somehow makes the car parks acceptable. So, on your next visit, pause a while and imagine the orchards full of pigs, the flowers and vegetables and George Heath working in his market garden.

The TotSoc Committee

The current TotSoc Committee Members are:

Judy Westacott	chair	cllr.westacott@southhams.gov.uk
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Dave Mitchell		dave@zenoshrdlu.com

Joining TotSoc

Please complete the form below and send it to:

Tony Mead
10 Castle Street,
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For Standing Orders, TotSoc's Bank Details are:

Account Name: **TotSoc**
Sort Code: **20 60 88** Acct No. **50878642**
Barclays Bank, 14 High Street, Totnes

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