



The Community Newsletter of TotSoc - the Totnes and District Society

Thanks for the Memories

Richard Davies

At times Totnes seems a long way away from my new home – but it isn't of course. North Devon isn't the other side of the world, even if it sometimes feels that way, as if somebody has turned the map upside down.

Sixty miles? What's that between friends, barely anything, and yes, of course I have been back.

Already there are changes – the new Rushbrook hub seems the most striking, with proposals for Dairy Crest – at last – and Great Court Farm (my final lead story for the Totnes Times was about that) about to come to fruition.

But Totnes is manifestly, magnificently, Totnes still, the place I came to know and love for ten years as a reporter. When I first sat at my desk in Warland, just a few short weeks before Bill Bennett sadly died, retirement seemed a long way away. But little by little it crept up on me, though I tried to delay its finality by cutting my working hours and job sharing for a while.

During my time I watched – and tried to record – the inexorable rise of the Transition Town movement from the moment when two individuals slid rather apologetically into the office outlining their proposals, to the astonishing internationally known organisation it is today.

Mayors came and went, all of them approachable, some combative, most with a keen eye for what would make news and an admirable way of getting Totnes

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into the headlines.

One – who will recognise herself (and that is, of course, quite a clue) was always keen to let me know what she did and didn't want in the paper.

"Put your pen down, please, Richard," - I am sure she said please – was a frequent request at Guildhall meetings. Was I always obedient? I tried to be. After all a weekly newspaper, while trying to tell the truth, is also very much a part of the community and doesn't set out to make enemies.

Unfortunately, there were clashes, particularly over the way Alan Langmaid left the museum. I thought the situation was badly handled, and lost my objectivity for a while. I regret that. But it has always been my nature to fight for the underdog, and I detest perceived unfairness.

The dispute made me think more fondly of hanging up my pen. There were long days and long meetings (after which a reporter's job is really just beginning) with every ring of the phone a gateway into the unknown.

There are people I miss, and not just the obvious ones; Ian Slatter was the very first person in the town to offer a hand of friendship when I nervously arrived at my first job in the town - Totnes Carnival parade. I will always be grateful to him for that. It was fun to try and photograph the notoriously camera-shy Paul Wesley – a joy to know David Horsburgh, always ready with a hand to shake and a kind word, the much-missed Tom Maughan, the excellent and now ex town clerk David Edwards, the splendidly feisty Vaughan Lindsay at Dartington, gentle, dedicated Vera Harvey, the multi-talented Alan Gorman, and gentle, devoted Eileen Crang, along with a host of others.

The furore over Dartington College of Art's move to Cornwall was probably the biggest story I dealt with, and I well remember Pruw Boswell's stupefaction when I told her about the proposal to move the college to Cornwall, and how hard she and others fought to prevent it.

Here too it was difficult to be objective, the campaigners cause was dear to my heart, especially with the financial damage the move was forecast to cause to Totnes. I wanted them to win, and for a time I thought they would.

But, despite backing from all over the world, the fight was lost. I have driven past the new campus outside Falmouth, and it has splendid facilities, but it isn't Dartington.

It was at the former home of the Elmhursts that I enjoyed one of my more memorable interviews - it would be a treat to talk to Terry Waite at any time, but somehow even more special in those surroundings. Other occasions stand

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out – being in the audience for Gardeners Question Time at KEVICC, watching a Rosamund Pilcher story filmed by a German crew in the High Street, and taking pictures of the Queen at Totnes railway station far nearer than her security people were happy with.

The day that Sarah Wollaston was chosen in the open primary brought one of the biggest media scrums to the Royal Seven Stars Hotel – and there weren't many weeks when that establishment didn't feature in the paper, one way or another.

Totnes was frequently national news. Rob Hopkins and Matt Harvey became synonymous with the town, putting everything they did under the microscope. There was the fuss about the town council doing away with official prayers before meetings – glory, what a fuss that caused – and another upset over whether or not the town council should celebrate the 200th anniversary of Trafalgar in case it upset the French...

Traffic – which way to drive, or should there be vehicles at all – was a subject guaranteed to start an argument, and I daresay still is. There was the endless slog through the recession, the fears, the worries, and the closure of Dairy Crest.

How much more can this town take, our front page thundered? But Totnes is resilient, Totnes is tough. A special town full of special people – even the ghost of Oliver Cromwell which hovered over the Guildhall (yes, he is thought to have been a visitor) has to get a look in.

During my time in Totnes I was – once, memorably – hoaxed, persistently intrigued, often exasperated, perpetually fascinated and always, always, conscious of my own shortcomings. But would I have missed it? Not for the world.

Totnes – thanks for the memories.

Chairman's Chat

Judy Westacott

During the past five years some large-scale housing developments have been given planning permission, and more sites are now being considered for inclusion in the new Local Plan. Government legislation has created a 'developers paradise' with a presumption in favour of permission being granted.

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Planning permission has already been given for nearly 300 homes to be built on just these two sites on either side of the Dart. Approval for several hundred more on other sites has already been granted.

As South Hams District Council are unable to prove that, at present, they have a five-year supply of housing development land there are few occasions when the refusal of permission can be justified. It is therefore extremely important that we, as a Society, do all that we can to protect the environmental setting of Totnes and the surrounding parishes.

As present, South Hams District Council is preparing a Green Infrastructure Plan (G.I.P.) which should have quality of life benefits for local communities. This will include a diverse range of studies concerning the siting of street trees, the management of farmland and the provision and maintenance of play areas. The benefits of a G.I.P. are wide-ranging and include space and habitat for wildlife, local food production, and adapting to climate change. It will also provide SHDC with examples for funding bids and Section 106 negotiations.

Biodiversity/Landscape/Heritage, Local Food/Fuel, Health/Access/Recreation, and Flood Alleviation/Water Quality are the four main themes. Project examples for the Totnes area include the Bridgetown Green Corridor, Dartington Estate, a Local Woodland Pilot and national Cycle Network links. A draft document has been prepared and has been recommended for adoption.

If the Neighbourhood Plans being prepared are in conflict with the

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development sites adopted in the Local Plan, the G.I.P. may provide a means of preventing the development of undesirable sites. We will continue to work in partnership with SHDC and any organisation or group that values the green space in, and around, our town and villages.

What could a Community Charter do for Totnes?

Isabel Carlisle

All over the UK communities find time and again that their voice is not heard loudly enough in the planning process. Under our current planning framework all they are able to do is object to new development, and when those applications go to appeal communities are faced with raising considerable sums of money to hire lawyers so that they can make a stand. It is exhausting, time-consuming and often ineffective. Granted, the Localism Act and Neighbourhood plans have opened an opportunity for communities to designate land for development, and the kind of development that they want to see happen. But this only goes so far.... as far as the local planning office where the Neighbourhood Plan is placed alongside the Local Plan.

What communities lack is a way of convening around a rights-based vision of what their communities are for, in the broadest sense. Neighbourhood Plan processes are clearly activating a wealth of grassroots expertise, demonstrating that often the people of a place have a vital contribution to make when major decisions are taken. What if that expertise took on the challenge of coming up with a unified vision for sustainable agricultural systems, sustainable energy systems, sustainable economies, real environmental protection, and improvement of health, safety and welfare in the community?

This is where the Community Charter comes in. Until now there has been no easily replicated mechanism for mapping community assets (both tangible and intangible) and stating shared values. Or for asserting the rights of communities and their responsibilities to the long-term economic and ecological well-being of the place in which they live. Or for claiming the right to participatory planning, or to prohibiting development that violates the assets and values of the community.

Two years ago, in 2013, the first Community Charter was brought into being by communities in and around Falkirk in Scotland that were mobilising

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against coal bed methane extraction, a process similar to fracking. A small team of us (now the Community Chartering Network) facilitated community conversations in which a broad spectrum of citizens named the assets of their place and surfaced common values. Those words went directly into the charter and were introduced with the statement “We declare our Cultural Heritage to be the sum total of the local tangible and intangible assets we have collectively agreed to be fundamental to the health and well-being of our present and future generations.”

The Falkirk Charter is at www.faug.org.uk/campaign/community-charter and if you visit the website you will see that the Charter is presented as a rights-based document that sets out “all the things in our local area which residents have agreed are fundamental to the present and future health of our communities. These ‘assets’ include a clean environment, our children, our homes, our community stability, a rich eco-system, food security, a healthy economy and trustworthy elected representatives.”

The Charter is not a legal document but as a piece of “vernacular” or “moral” law that gathers support from signatures it is a material consideration in any planning process. Unlike a Neighbourhood Plan it covers the entire lived experience of community. It is a benchmark against which any proposed planning needs to be measured, and a living document that is regularly revisited. Its power comes from the strength of support for it in the community, and that it is held by and regularly revisited by the community, as a living document. When any development is proposed, citizens can turn immediately to Charter and represent the views of the community to the developer, landowner and planning authorities.

Here in Totnes, where a Charter is being considered to complement the Neighbourhood Plan, it offers a way to establish a shared long-term vision that includes Atmos, the future of Great Court Farm, Caring Town Totnes, new housing developments and much else. In Scotland, the Falkirk Charter has played a key role in winning a moratorium on drilling for unconventional gas from the Scottish government and new Charters are springing up every week. Dartington Parish is currently making a Charter, as is St Ives in Cornwall. As these communities begin to join up we will see a new future emerge, not just in response to what they oppose but what they are collectively for.

Isabel Carlisle lives in Totnes, is helping with the Dartington Neighbourhood Plan, and heads up education for Transition Network. She is a co-founder of the Community Chartering Network - www.communitychartering.org

Reasons to be Cheerful?

Kate Wilson



Recently there have been exciting events happening locally in the world of planning – not a realm given to much excitement usually, but the Future Homes Conference at Dartington Hall, jointly organised by Dartington Hall Trust, Dartington Parish Council and Transition Town Totnes in February, was an enjoyable exception. This conference, billed as an alternative to the traditional, developer-led ways of looking at house building, was aimed at those involved in Neighbourhood Planning, from volunteers to landowners, architects and planners. Conference delegates, including our MP Dr Sarah Wollaston, were treated to inspiring presentations from a wide range of speakers many of whom are experts in their field and living locally. A wide range of topics was covered from affordability, community land trusts and self-build (including a presentation by TotSoc Committee member Jim Carfrae) to the unexpectedly entertaining presentation on Air Tightness Testing. Facilitated discussion sessions focused on Neighbourhood Planning, Place-Making and creating resilient communities among other issues. It was an inspirational conference. But if you missed it, you needn't miss out, because the conference was videoed and is available to see at <http://www.dartington.org/futurehomes>. There is an event overview which gives a flavour of what's on offer, and each speaker's presentation is available in full. Have a look and be inspired!

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The Conference reinforced for me the knowledge that Neighbourhood Planning is about people and places. The more people that become involved in any Neighbourhood Plan, the better the place will be. It *is* hard work and involves a lot of meetings, but it is a great opportunity to talk with others, share hopes, fears and also, at times, disillusionment. Talking about our surroundings creates bonds between people. I saw, or rather heard, this happen time and time again at Meadowbrook Social Club on the last Saturday in February where more than 170 people came to visit the Dartington Neighbourhood Plan Open Day. This was the first opportunity for those in the Task Groups involved in Dartington's Neighbourhood Plan to share their ideas with each other, and with other people who live and work in the parish. Meadowbrook was buzzing! This could have had something to do with the copious amount of cake that was on offer, but I think what I heard was the sound of greater understanding of the purpose of the plan, and recognition of what might be possible. There are many opportunities that can be turned into reality by working together and few things that don't benefit from being shared – cake included.

As in many things, the notion that bigger is better is prevalent in planning. We are told that developers will build the biggest because there are economies of scale which will benefit the community. There probably are economies of scale, but whether they are to the benefit of the community is a matter of opinion, and those opinions need to have a voice. With Neighbourhood Planning we have possibly the best opportunity we have ever had to influence how things are done. We shouldn't waste it, and we certainly shouldn't be intimidated by our perceptions of how the planning system functions at the moment.

If you want to find out more about Dartington's neighbourhood plan, please visit the website www.dartingtonnp.wordpress.com

Neighbourhood Plan for Totnes

Paul Bennett

What is a Neighbourhood Plan and why should we have one? In conception it was a child of the "Big Society" and its birth announced by the Localism Act 2011. The averred intention is to enable communities to play a much stronger role in shaping the areas in which they live and work and in supporting new development proposals. It sits alongside the Local Plan (now being prepared by SHDC and designated "Our Plan"). Decisions on planning

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applications will be made using both “Our Plan” and the Neighbourhood Plan and any other “material considerations” meaning effectively that both plans are subject to the diktats of the National Planning Policy Framework (hence the inability of SHDC planners to do other than recommend approval for the development at Great Court Farm).

Real choices for the community are therefore, in practise, severely limited by central government’s imperative to build more houses ignoring any local community opposition. Whilst the intention of giving power to local communities is laudable, the reality of creating a neighbourhood plan is far from straightforward. Town and Parish Councils who are expected to promote these plans have neither the financial nor manpower resources, which has resulted in many proposed plans falling by the wayside. This has been alleviated to a certain extent by some central government grant funding but nevertheless remains a substantial obstacle; virtually all communities of the size and importance of Totnes have required outside professional help to draw up the plan.

There are seven stages in neighbourhood planning:

1. Designating a neighbourhood plan area.
2. Preparing a draft neighbourhood plan
3. Pre-submission publicity & consultation.
4. Submission of a neighbourhood plan proposal to the local planning authority
5. Independent Examination
- 6&7. Referendum and Making the neighbourhood plan.

Why is it complex and time-consuming? Because it is intended to have statutory force, each step above has to comply with strict criteria. In Step 2 preparing to write the Plan proposals must be realistic and based on firm evidence after widespread community consultation. It is important not to raise expectations beyond what is reasonable and it has to be compatible with the Local Planning Authority’s Plan for the wider area and be compliant with National Planning Policy. In particular it must be stressed that a neighbourhood plan is a means to an end and not an end in itself.

Step 3 requires that the proposed plan shall be subject to a 6-week consultation before it is submitted to the local authority for independent examination. This includes seeking views from other bodies e.g. Devon County Council, English Heritage and Natural England. Following any amendments consequent upon this consultation the Neighbourhood Plan then (Step 4) goes

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to the Local Planning Authority, which is responsible for ensuring that it has followed proper legal process before Step 5 is reached with the appointment of an Independent Examiner.

The role of the Examiner is to consider whether the plan meets basic conditions set out by law e.g. that the Plan has regard to national and local policies, also human rights requirements and EU obligations. He does not consider the overall merits of the Plan. Assuming the Plan passes the examination the Local Planning Authority then arranges for a referendum to be held with those on the electoral register being entitled to vote. If more than 50% of those voting vote “yes” than the Local Planning Authority will bring the Plan into force. (Steps 6 and 7). Once in force the Plan forms part of the statutory Development Plan for the area. Having regard to the substantial amount of work involved the need for outside professional help in supporting the preparation of the plan is I believe self-evident.

Work on the Totnes Neighbourhood Plan was started over three years ago by the Housing & Built Environment Forum with an application to designate a neighbourhood area, which in this case was co-terminus with the Totnes town boundary. The application to grant this was successful and the Town Council subsequently took over formal responsibility for the preparation of the draft plan. One of the key elements of a neighbourhood plan is that rather than being “handed down” by local authority planners it should be written by community representatives after extensive consultation with the wider community and genuinely represent the range of wants and needs in the local area..

Nevertheless the expected time frame for completing all of the steps referred to is generally expected to be between eighteen months and two years. Unfortunately the process here in Totnes after nearly three years has reached only the very early stages of Step 2. This highlights the problem alluded to earlier – the failure in the legislation setting up the process to provide the resources needed to achieve its objectives. Many neighbourhood plans have foundered because of this and Totnes is not alone in failing to move ahead within an acceptable time frame. Recognising this the Town Council, through the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, took the decision to appoint an outside Chair and a paid but part time Co-ordinator with the remit to drive the project forward to the conclusion of Steps 6 & 7. Only if all the steps are successfully completed will the Neighbourhood Plan receive statutory status, which in turn enables it to shape the future of the town.

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Totnes is described by Nikolas Pevsner in the Buildings of England “Devon” as “one of the most rewarding small towns in England, appealing in the visual variety of the small buildings close-packed within the framework of its medieval street plan” and W.G. Hoskins in his seminal history and description of Devon refers to Totnes as “next to Exeter and Plymouth, the most interesting town in Devon”. An enormous responsibility therefore rests on us to produce a plan worthy of a past, which needs to be reflected in its future. In doing so it has to be acknowledged that very little of the development undertaken within the last fifty years or so can be said to have enhanced the built environment of the town. Inevitably much of any plan produced will be aspirational rather than tangible. Where this is the case it is hoped that external bodies having a more direct responsibility for such policy areas will take seriously their duty to comply with a Neighbourhood Plan that has statutory status.

With the Neighbourhood Plan being limited to the town boundary there are now no more “Greenfield” sites available for development within the Plan area. We therefore need to look at existing land uses and examine whether better use can be made of “brownfield” sites. It is for this reason that Totsoc is putting forward various sites within the town (including car parks which might have potential for housing development above them) also areas such as the disused magistrates court to provide much needed affordable housing, particularly for younger people who otherwise would have to leave the town; as plainly it is vital to maintain a balanced population. It is here that external professional help is required to carry out an initial assessment of these sites to advise on the options, which might be available for further consideration.

We also need to be much more conscious of the open spaces within the town and how they can be better cared for. The architect Richard Rogers in a recent article regarding well-designed cities argues that “Good public space, civilises the city, bringing colour, light and joy to our everyday lives, and boosting our civic health”. That is certainly something to which our Neighbourhood Plan should aspire.

If anyone wishes to become involved (in whatever way) in the work needed to deliver this Neighbourhood Plan do please get in touch either with me or our Co-ordinator, Thea Platt [info@totnesneighbourhoodplan.org].

Paul Bennett [Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group]

Church of the Holy Trinity, Torbryan

Lawrence Green

Torbryan is a remote hamlet lying in a fold of wooded limestone hills a long mile and a half from any other village. Where the neighbouring villages of Ipplepen and Broadhempston have thrived little Torbryan with its wonderful perpendicular church has gently declined to consist of the Rectory, the ancient Church House Inn, three farms and thirteen cottages in the 1970s. It has grown slightly and sympathetically in recent years but is still very much a village of fifty years ago with its farmyards and orchards set behind the church. Surrounded by wooded ridges riddled with caves, Torbryan church nestles in its coombe.

Seen from Orley Common the church gleams a spectral white against dark woods.



Most mediaeval churches were built to be covered with a lime render to cover the often porous stone of which they were built. Entering the raised churchyard from the direction of the Church House Inn we pass through the

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original sixteenth century lychgate with its cobbled floor, tiny loft and carved oak beams. The village side of the churchyard is held up by a dry limestone wall.

The high tower is similar to the tower of the church of St Andrew at Ipplepen with its turreted stairway on the south side and small buttresses on each side of the tower corners. There are four delightful fifteenth century heads on the south side of the tower beneath two empty statuary niches.

Entrance to the church is through a fine porch which retains its fan vaulted roof, with damage to three of the four carved angels, and its upper room. The interior is a strikingly complete example of early fifteenth century perpendicular grace. Large clear windows show off the remaining mediaeval



stained glass placed pleasingly in the upper lights. The wagon roof stretching from the tower to the east window was restored in 1840 but the flat ceilings of the aisles retain the original massive fifteenth century beams.

The beer stone arcades with their carved foliar capitals are particularly fine as are the very early box pews which bear close scrutiny. During the reign of Queen Anne the original oak pews were clad in stained wood to form box pews with latched doors to keep out stray drafts. The lower backs and pew ends were retained as armrests, a most unusual arrangement. As Torbryan became a less wealthy and important place and as the lords of the manor

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became increasingly impoverished a degree of recycling in the church fittings was employed.

The wonderful screen with its almost unique painted panels was built between 1470 and 1480. When the rood loft was removed, parts of it were used to build the pulpit. Panels from the old pulpit were used to construct the altar and six altar candlesticks were made from twisted pieces of the old altar rail.

It is said that the painted screen panels were hastily whitewashed by the Rector, Revd. Edward Goswell, as the Roundhead army approached. His grave is marked by yet another example of recycling. The original altar slab with its five incised crosses now forms the Rector's tomb in front of the altar.

The floor of the church is level and paved by a mixture of plain tiles, limestone slabs, Ashburton marble slabs and the occasional grave slab, by far the best of which is an Ashburton marble grave cover dating from 1680 dedicated to Joane Venning. The paving beneath the tower has a timeless feel with its different uneven paving slabs.

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The timeless feel of this beautiful church is accentuated by the lowing of cows from the nearby farm and the complete lack of any traffic noise. The sanctuary and choir behind the polychrome screen are remote and inaccessible because of some wilful damage to two of the painted screen panels which happened last year. Today you cannot get close to the screen because of an alarm system that is activated when you step over a red rug on the floor. If, in a moment of absorbed curiosity, you do so, a harsh official voice announces that you have crossed the line and that help is at hand to save the screen from you, the vandal. Needless to say no burly coppers rushed into the church to question us and safeguard a national treasure. That is not to say that it would not happen on another occasion. The legacy of a stupid and senseless act of vandalism is now shared by all of us.

Because the church has been closed for the past twenty years due to a lack of sufficient congregation to support it, the Churches Conservation Trust takes very good care of it. Electricity has been installed; there was none in the church as recently as the late 1980s. There is good ventilation and no musty smell present. Services are held in the church on an occasional basis.

Before leaving the building it is worth looking through the screen (without approaching too closely!) into the sanctuary where can be seen an unusual early Victorian reredos with the usual Ten Commandments unusually surrounding gospel texts. There is also a good Victorian stained glass window above the altar and various monuments on the choir walls.

Pause for a minute to look at the monument slab in the north chancel aisle to William Peters, Thomas Cromwell's right hand man during the suppression of the monasteries. He was one of the lords of the manor of Torbryan. The nearby font is fourteenth century with a fine but worm-eaten Jacobean cover.

In the churchyard can be found a cherry tree and a fine yew. On the south side of the east corner of the church is a particularly fine plain box tomb with a finely incised slate slab on its side dating from 1635, a particularly early example. The war memorial above the south churchyard wall is a mediaeval two stage octagonal base with a shaft surmounted by a modern granite plain cross. The inscription of the memorial has become almost unreadable.

Turn round to face the church before you leave. In the dusk it will stand out mainly white with distinctive red sandstone quoins and crenulations. If you are lucky you might see some of the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe Bats emerge from the tower to hunt the insects that thrive in limestone country.

The TotSoc Committee

The current TotSoc Committee Members are:

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