

BETTER BALTIC WHARF

Last year TQ9 (Baltic Wharf Ltd) applied for Outline Planning Permission to redevelop the Totnes boatyard and warehousing complex known as Baltic Wharf. Many local people felt that the proposals would create over-development at the gateway to the precious lower Dart Valley landscape, with too many buildings, many of them too high, and a huge flow of traffic in and out of the site every day. It was felt that the amount of new employment on the site, and the limited number of affordable homes for local people, did not justify the proposed level of development. That was clearly the conclusion of South Hams District Councillors when they eventually turned the Application down.

Vociferous community opposition to the Application was one of the reasons it failed. However, when TQ9 announced it would re-apply, a small group of local people decided it wasn't good enough to sit on the sidelines and be critical – far better to try to work with the developer to negotiate something more acceptable. So G4BW was formed by four people acting as volunteers in the community interest. Although we are all members of various community organisations, we have acted independently so that these organisations are not compromised by our work.

From the outset, our initiative has been welcomed by TQ9, who have been willing to spend many days of time developing the scheme with us, rather than simply resorting to an Appeal process. On occasions the negotiations have been difficult and tense to the point of near breakdown, but there has been such determination and goodwill on both sides that significant progress has been achieved. Other extensive public consultation by TQ9 has also helped shape the changes now incorporated in the second Outline Planning Application.

G4BW believes that the compromises and improvements incorporated into this Application are such that it can recommend acceptance to the community and to local Councillors.

The key changes since the first Application are:

- It is clearer that the revitalised boatyard area could maintain its current capacity, and is likely to gain a new major facility. In response to other community concerns, there will also be legal covenants built in to protect continuing marine uses, including any revival of water-born transportation/port facilities
- The number of dwellings will be reduced from 250 (maximum) to about 180, with density substantially down from 83 units per hectare to 60, making the development much more suitable for its sensitive edge-of-town location
- The amount of affordable housing has been raised from a minimum of 20% (maximum 40%) to a minimum of 30% (maximum of 50%), hopefully allowing quite a lot more local people to find homes here

- In the retirement village the number of ‘supported living’ dwellings has come down from 100 to 75, and the potential development partner has shown that similar developments elsewhere attract a very high proportion of residents from the local area. There is also evidence that the dwellings in such developments can be affordable for people of relatively modest means.
- The nursing home remains at 60 beds, but is likely to be split into 4 distinct units, possibly with specialist functions for e.g. dementia. This would make the scale more acceptable. Some of the onsite services could provide outreach for e.g. home care in the community. TQ9 have also made it clear that they would be keen to work with Devon County Council to provide ‘public’ care services at Baltic Wharf if that were a possibility.
- Maximum building heights have come down from 5 storeys (4 storeys over an undercroft storey of parking) to 4 storeys, with maximum heights across the scheme strictly limited by Condition. This will significantly reduce the impact on the landscape, and will limit damage to the visitor experience from boats on the river
- Homes will now be built to better environmental standards (Code Levels 4-6 rather than 3-4), with facilities built in to some units to allow owners to easily upgrade to higher standards
- Retail floorspace has reduced from 800 square metres down to 500, minimising competition with town centre businesses (which should gain from additional business generated by Baltic Wharf residents)
- A ‘green corridor’, no less than 10 metres wide at its very narrowest point, has been created below Sharpham Drive to maintain the close visual connection between the town and the surrounding countryside, and to minimise greenfield development outside the existing Development Boundary
- In response to great local concern, car parking on the site has been considerably reduced, with parking provision for dwellings cut to leading edge ‘sustainability’ standards. The original 514 spaces (including 70 shared use) have been cut to 400 (no shared). This is supported by an undertaking to actively manage the parking with a restricted access/charging regime to prevent the development turning into a public parking facility
- Traffic flows could be as much as 30% less overall, and could be down 40-50% at peak times
- Further reductions in traffic are likely to result from the developers’ undertaking to implement an unusually rigorous ‘best-practice’ Travel Plan for the site, supporting bus services, car club, car sharing, cycle use, etc. There is also an undertaking to support (in conjunction with County Council initiatives) Travel Planning for the whole town; and to reduce on-site parking in response to its success

Our view is that this site will inevitably be redeveloped at some point in the future. At present we are fortunate to have TQ9 as a local developer, working on proposals with a local firm of award-winning architects (Harrison Sutton Partnership). Together,

they have come up with a set of modified, high quality proposals based on consultation and compromise.

We do understand why some people would like Totnes to remain just as it is today but we believe that this cannot happen in the real world of extreme housing shortage across the UK – and in the South West in particular. We also believe that Totnes stands to gain from a rather larger population to support its shops and other businesses, and to achieve improvement in key community facilities.

We therefore commend the new proposals for Baltic Wharf, and hope that a successful Application this time will mean that local investment in regenerating the site can continue, and that it will stimulate other investment for the town as a whole.

Paul Bennett

for G4BW