

The Community Newsletter of TotSoc - the Totnes and District Society

Planning Issues

In last July's issue of Contact we reported on the shelving of work on the SHDC Development Plan Document (DPD). This month that process has been restarted. Below are details of the opening stage – an *Enquiry by Design* managed by the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment held in Totnes earlier this month. This month also sees the submission of an application to develop Baltic Wharf.

1. Enquiry by Design

This month saw the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment run series of eight one-day *Enquiry by Design* day as part of the next step in South Hams District Council's plans for housing and employment. The intention was to use the EbD process to prioritise the list of possible development sites that will be considered for development. SHDC's core strategy requires 400 homes to be built in Totnes by 2016 (and perhaps more than that again by 2026).

The first of these looked at Totnes and involved councillors and officers from Devon County Council, SHDC, Totnes Town Council as well as a number of community representatives, including Louis Victory of TotSoc (standing in for Paul Bennett) and fellow committee member Dave Mitchell (representing Design Our Space).

Much of the morning was devoted to presentations on the DPD process (by Lee Bray, head of Forward Planning at SHDC) and the concepts behind EbD (by members of the PF). We were then split into four groups with each group asked to discuss the 40 possible sites and come up with a short list. At the end of the day there was lengthy discussion of these, with some signs of consensus. The PF will be producing a report summarizing their findings (based on what was said that day) and SHDC have agreed to follow their recommendations.

Two key issues aroused heated debate. First the question of

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"windfall sites". Up to now, SHDC have refused to accept that the future development of certain large sites (e.g. Baltic Wharf and Dairy Crest) KEVICC should count towards the 400 homes required by 2016. Instead they have reserved the right to call these windfalls. Lee Bray of SHDC now appears to have agreed that all the sites that have been identified during the DPD process (such as Baltic Wharf) should not be classed as windfalls.

The second issue is whether there are limits to the growth of Totnes (imposed by things like traffic flows, parking and other infrastructure factors). By and large the community seems to think there are but the current planning process does not!

2. Baltic Wharf

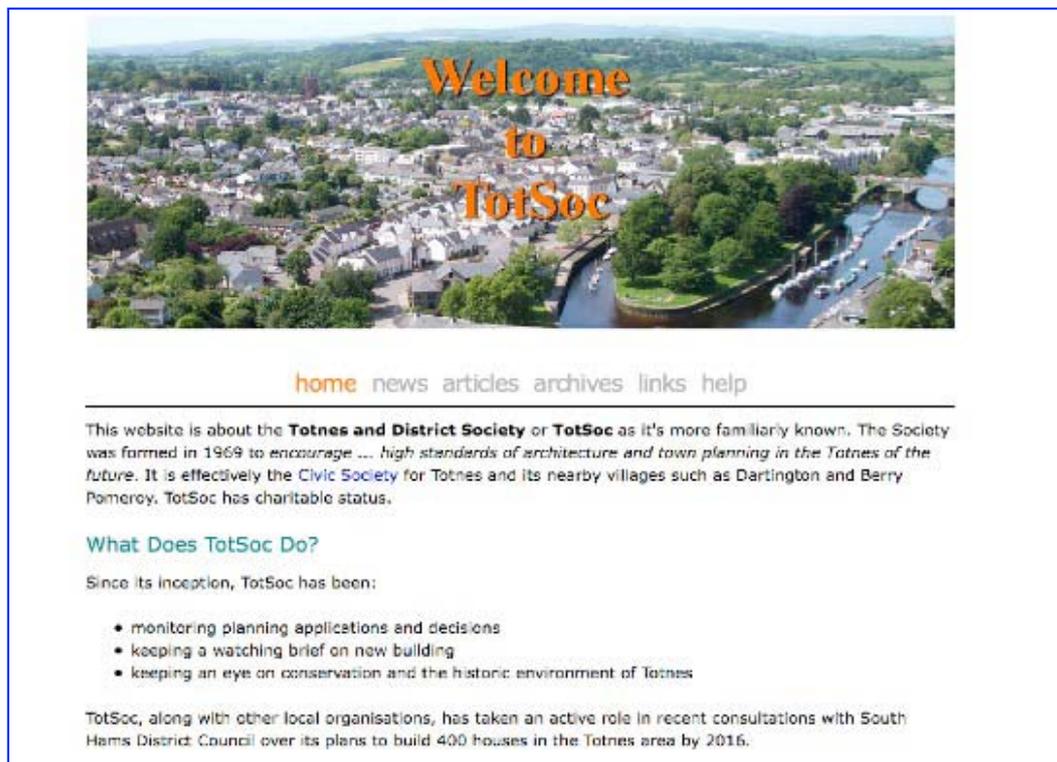
The recent outline planning application for Baltic Wharf has received a lot of publicity. TotSoc, along with several other local community associations and groups views the current plan as a massive over-development. While most (including TotSoc) welcome the development of the site, the latest version of the plan has increased the total number of homes while reducing the proportion of affordable

units. It has dramatically increased the number of parking spaces (to 500+) and the heights of the buildings (up to 6 storeys in places, some 26 feet higher than the Steam Packet Inn).

A letter calling for the proposal to be withdrawn and a radically revised proposal submitted has been co-signed by TotSoc and 8 other local organizations has been sent to SHDC.

The TotSoc Website

For some time, TotSoc has intended to set up a website. Thanks to committee-member David Mitchell we now have one. At a cost of around £10 a year we have more than enough web space as well as an official email address. The picture below shows the front page.



The website, at www.totsoc.org.uk, will contain details of forthcoming events (such as this year's AGM - see page 7) as well as downloadable copies of Contact and official correspondence. The official TotSoc email address is now info@totsoc.org.uk.

We hope you like the new format of **Contact** but welcome any suggestions for articles or other improvements. To keep costs down please email Paul Bennett (paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com) so that we can send future editions to members by email.

The Leechwell Garden

David Mitchell (chair of DOS)

During the community consultation organised by DOS (Design Our Space) between 2003 and 2006 to plan the future of the Southern Area, it was decided that the "Bungalow Garden", a piece of private land owned by South Hams District Council off St Katherine's Way, should become a new public open space, to be known as the "Leechwell Garden". A design for the garden by Landscape Architect Charlotte Rathbone was approved at a public meeting in 2006, but work on the garden could not start until work by Midas on the four Southern Area building sites had finished.

At the last AGM of DOS, held in the Civic Hall in October 2008, it was decided that the Leechwell Garden should be managed by a new organisation. As a result, at a public meeting at Birdwood House in January 2009, the Leechwell Garden Association was formed. The Association is chaired by Mark Chapman, who has just moved in to one of the new houses on Heathway West. Its secretary is Sue Holmes, who led the DOS Group that managed the design process, and its treasurer is Ed Vidler, of the Totnes Development Trust (which will provide the charitable 'umbrella' for the Association). Now that Midas have removed their portacabins, work on the garden can begin.

For more information about the Association visit its website at leechwellgarden.org.uk

2006 Garden Design



The TotSoc Plaques Project

John Keleher

It was over a thousand years ago that the first settlement was established in Totnes, and there are still some buildings in the town which date back to the Tudor period and beyond. So the Totnes and District Society agreed it would be a good idea if visitors to the town - and residents as well - had the opportunity to learn a little something about a few of them, as they threaded their way up the main street deciding which coffee shop to patronise. It was eventually agreed that the plaque was the most appropriate (i.e. accessible) medium of enlightenment.

But first a number of decisions had to be taken and a number of hurdles had to be overcome. For example: Which buildings should get a plaque? Who do we have to square it with in order to get the go-ahead? What will the plaques be made of? What do we put on them? And, of course, Who is going to pay? However, after lengthy correspondence with owners and tenants; town, district and county councils - which took up the best part of a year - it was eventually agreed that four sites below should be graced with a plaque:

- the Town Mill
- the Guildhall
- the Museum
- the East Gate

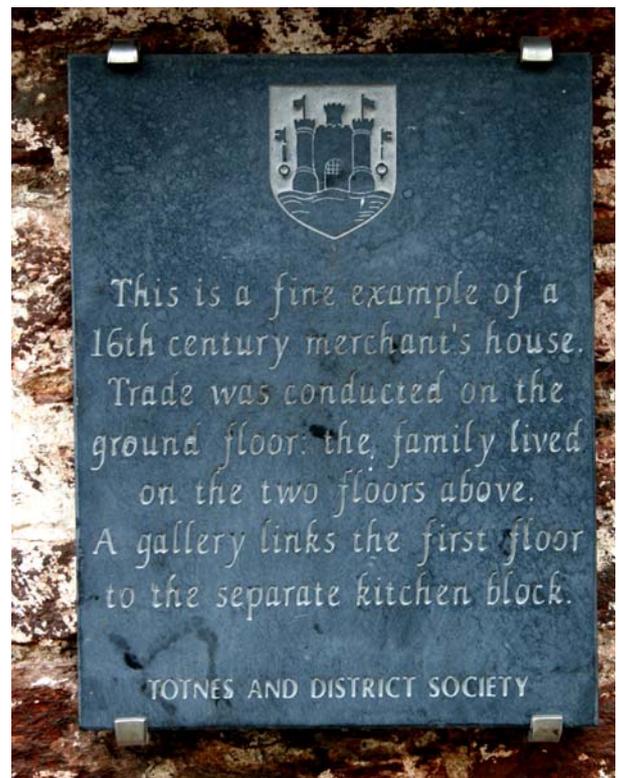
Unfortunately within a fortnight of it being attached to the wall near the East Gate that plaque was removed by a/some local vandal(s) and has yet to be returned. We live in hope!

While all this was going on TOTSOC secured the participation of a local monumental mason, without whose help the project would never have been completed. Steve Allwood recommended

that they be made of slate and undertook to be responsible for putting TotSoc's text onto the material. The total cost of the project was just under £1400, and was made possible by a matched funding grant under the Awards for All Scheme, which is part of the National Lottery. It was the late Luke Fitzherbert who held our hand during this process.

So next time you're in Totnes why not search out the buildings - and the plaques, which will tell you a bit about them. The Totnes Image Bank has taken the photographs of the plaques and the buildings, so it shouldn't take too long. Incidentally the Image Bank is housed in one of the 'plaque'd' buildings, the Town Mill, and that's worth a visit too!

The Museum Plaque



Totnes Treasures

An occasional series by Sue Bennett

I am sure that all of us who are lucky enough to live in this area appreciate the unique, individual shops that far outnumber the national and multinational chains and have thankfully so far prevented Totnes becoming a "Clone Town": we must ensure this always remains the case. With this in mind I intend to write a series of features on some of these treasures although, as our Contact Magazine only comes out twice yearly, it will take me a little while to achieve this!

My first stop is The Totnes Wine Company near the top of the High Street. Nigel Pound took over ownership of the shop ten years ago. It had been a store selling jeans for about 5 years but before that had been a haberdashers for many years.

Nigel is a true Devonian: born near Dartmouth and attending school in Kingsbridge. After finishing his schooling he moved to Oxford where he completed a Diploma in Management. Some 35 years ago he started in the wine trade by accident or fate - Nigel prefers to call it fate - he and his wife were holidaying in Devon when Nigel spotted a job advertised in the Western Morning News for work with a large national brewery, Bass, at their Regional Office. He got the job and learned the trade: Bass also ran a wine department and Nigel soon discovered that his interest lay mainly in that side of the business. For the next 15 years or so Nigel learned the wine trade, working for many different companies and building up a fund of knowledge and experience which has stood him in good stead in his role as owner of Totnes Wine.

I asked Nigel about the range of his customer base and he divided it into thirds: one third local (in Totnes or within 3 miles); one third within 30 miles and the final third from all over the country. He doesn't think the business would survive with just local trade, but acknowledges that the local trade is important as a sort of interactive deal - local people expect their traders to have good product knowledge, to provide a good service and be part of

the life-style of the town in that the customers share more in common with the traders that just buying their goods - there is a strong community link between 'them' and 'us'. People attending lectures in the town, those attending Ways with Words or the annual International Music Festival at Dartington often take the opportunity to pop in to buy some of Nigel's wines.

This seems to me to be the essence of the excellent shopping in this town. Nigel enjoys the mix of his local customers - from composers, film producers, TV personalities to nurses, refuse collectors, ordinary families who like to buy a special bottle of wine for a weekend treat. The shop is a splendid wood panelled Aladdin's Cave and Nigel himself is the antithesis of what we perhaps think of as the typical stuffy, aloof wine merchant. He welcomes all whether they are buying cheapish wine for a party or chateau bottled at £100+. Advice is what he is so good at: tell him what you want the wine for, what you want to drink it with, roughly how much you have to spend and he will come up trumps.

I asked him to hazard a guess about the number of towns in England who could still boast an independent wine merchant. He was unsure but thought the numbers were falling but in the west country there were only about ten who met up every so often under the auspices of the West of England Wine and Spirit Association.

Asked about his future plans Nigel was very clear. These are two-pronged:

1. to keep up with the times and focus on his product range offering what he called "benchmark wines": wines with good credentials and qualities which means sourcing good quality but reasonably priced estate-produced wines retailing at under £8 per bottle.
2. to expand his trade business - selling on to

other wine merchants who perhaps don't have the expertise/turnover/willingness to import their wines direct. To attain his "benchmark wines" and to continue to expand trade business he takes between 4 and 5 buying trips to Europe each year.

There are also wine tasting lunches and dinners, river trips to the Sharpham estate to sample their wines, spring and summer tastings, visits from famous winemakers, and an annual Christmas Extravaganza

with a regular newsletter to keep customers up-to-date with the latest special offers and events.

Nigel's enthusiasm for the wine trade is palpable and infectious: "every wine has a story" he says. The story could be that of the producer of the wine, the shipper, the consumer who may have an attachment to a certain wine, maybe drunk on holiday or on a special occasion, or Nigel himself, the wine merchant and how he manages to find his "benchmark wines".

Judy Westacott writes ...

The other day I was asked by a neighbour if her son could interview me as part of his school homework. He had to gather information about the Reeves timber yard and any other building/employment site that had contributed to the economy of the town, and had since disappeared.

Three sites came to mind, Reeves, the Harris Bacon Factory and Dairy Crest, alas all no more! It made me think about the part that each had played in the past and the outcome of their closure.

The Reeves family had a long association with the town and the river, and operated from a large site which stretched from the Steampacket Inn to New walk (now, of course, a Westward Development housing complex.) Many timber ships unloaded on Baltic Wharf and timber was dispatched to many other branches. I remember well the rusty galvanised sheds, the hustle and bustle of the site with men unloading, loading and moving piles of timber. It was a noisy, dusty and untidy place but a hive of activity, and provided skilled and unskilled jobs. The timber ships sailing up the beautiful river Dart kept the channel open by dispersing the silt. Di Reeves - who lives in the town -has commissioned a book about the history of the site and her family's involvement, keep your eye open for it as it has now been published. The site is tidier now, and a new road runs through it, sadly the jobs

have gone forever as has the Taunton Memorial demolished by one of the timber lorries!

I remember the Harris Bacon Factory, also a source of employment for the town, which is now home to Morrison's - hardly an example of architectural merit! Once a week the pigs were transported to the site with much squealing, eventually to end up as pies and bacon in the retail shop in Mill Lane - where the Bookmakers is today.

Sadly the Dairy Crest business closed its doors, and its Social Club, a short while ago, with the loss of yet more jobs. The Brunel Pumping Station attracted attention, when Dairycrest started to demolish it. Thanks to the Town Council, this Society and especially Pruw Boswell, the Heritage Champion, English Heritage eventually listed it thus preserving a little bit of the towns history for future generations. As I'm sure most of you know, a branch of Transition Town Totnes, has exciting plans for the site - a combination of much needed employment and housing all of it high quality and sustainable. Rest assured that we, as a Society, will be monitoring progress.

Being interviewed prompted me to think about the other changes that have occurred during the last 20 years. The Art Studios come workshops behind the Civic Hall car park have become

Belsham Court Housing; the Southern Area is being transformed and replaced with yet more housing; the Builders Yard off Ticklemore Street is now three flats; the old Dairy Site by the Railway and the adjoining welding site have planning permission; and Harrisons Garage on the old bridge and that which used to be

on the Plains are now housing developments. Times change, and the town changes too, whether these changes have enhanced it or detracted from it I will leave to you to decide.

The Sustainable Communities Act by Louis Victory

A major programme is underway in Government, led by the Department of Communities and Local Government, to empower communities to shape their own futures.

Following an extensive lobbying campaign by an organisation called Local Works, the Sustainable Communities Act became law in 2007. It encourages local Councils to consult the community about what they would like to see happen in their area, and to identify ideas for making it happen.

Where such ideas would be difficult or impossible to implement at the moment, proposals can be drawn up for Government to change the law, or to change its current practices; or for Local Government to acquire new powers.

These proposals may then be submitted to the national Local Government Association (LGA), which is charged with sorting and prioritising all proposals and putting a coherent change programme to Government for approval.

Although the Secretary of State reserves the right to veto proposals, it is assumed that reasonable and productive changes will be accepted.

South Hams District Council is one of the first local councils to implement the Act. Timescales are limited

in the first round of submissions, which has resulted in restricted consultation, but 10 proposals will soon be put to the South Hams citizens' panel for final voting on what should go to the LGA.

The current top priority is a proposal from Totnes and District Community Strategy Group for changes which would give communities first refusal if they wish to acquire land or buildings put up for sale; would make it easier for Councils to transfer assets to their community; and would set up much-improved national funding for community acquisitions.

If these proposals become law, it is likely that we will see, for instance, more Community Land Trusts set up to build affordable housing or start social enterprise developments to create sustainable employment. It would also become easier for local people to buy and save their local shop or post office or pub, a growing and often very necessary trend in rural areas.

Given such proposals, the effect of the Sustainable Communities Act may well be to reinvigorate many aspects of community life and development.

2009 TotSoc AGM

The 2009 TotSoc AGM will be held on Thursday the 26th of November at the United Free Church, Fore Street Totnes. It will start at 7pm and be followed by a talk at 7.30, although the speaker has not yet been decided.

The TotSoc Committee

The current TotSoc Committee Members are:

Judy Westacott	chair	cllr.westacott@southhams.gov.uk
Paul Bennett	secretary and planning officer	paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com
Sue Bennett		paulandsuebennett@btinternet.com
Lionel Harper	treasurer	harp@prandl.plus.com
Pruw Boswell		harp@prandl.plus.com
Jim Carfrae		jim@carfrae.com
Keith Mackenzie		k.b.mackenzie@tesco.net
Dave Mitchell		dave@zenoshrdlu.com
Louis Victory		louis.victory@btinternet.com

Louis Victory, who moved to Totnes last year, has agreed to join the Committee. Louis, who trained as an architect, has spent most of his working life in local government - particularly in town planning. He has already proved useful – standing in for Paul Bennett at the Enquiry by Design day (see page 1).

Joining TotSoc

Please complete the form below and send it to:

Lionel Harper
3 Meadow Close
Harberton,
Totnes, Devon TQ9 7TW

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

Name			
Address			
Postcode		Telephone	
I have enclosed a cheque (made payable to Totsoc) for £8.00 (family membership)			<input type="checkbox"/>
£5.00 (single membership)			<input type="checkbox"/>
I have arranged for my bank to pay annually by STANDING ORDER			<input type="checkbox"/>
I confirm that I pay income tax and that I am willing for TotSoc to reclaim GIFT AID on my donations annually			<input type="checkbox"/>