



The Community Newsletter of TOTSOC – the Totnes and District Society

Welcome to the Spring 2025 Edition of Contact.

We have some interesting articles for you in this edition. Jim Carfrae tells about the start – and stop – of the transition homes at Puddavine. Then there’s a summary of what TOTSOC has been doing recently, a revisiting of the finds at Totnes Castle which makes use of all the latest information since the original assessment, and then a report on the impressive achievements of Ukrainian Action’s Team Devon.

Hasn’t it been quiet in Totnes High Street these last few months – until the gas and other works finished that is? And wasn’t the air cleaner? But I’ve had no further responses from members regarding traffic in Fore Street and High Street. Without this it is difficult for your committee to take this issue forward so here’s a last opportunity to express your views. It’s almost 10 years since the scheme implemented by Devon County Council was withdrawn following High Court action. Since then, the number of pedestrians has increased significantly and more cafes have tables outside, so the issue of traffic nuisance and air pollution is even more acute. At this stage we are NOT after views on traffic management but to find out if you think TOTSOC should take up this issue and consult more widely in a search for a better solution. **Please reply to me at rod@thehewetts.co.uk**

We welcome new members and encourage you to join if not already a member - or if you are, to encourage others to join. The membership fee is modest and details on how to join are on the back page of this newsletter.

Rod Hewett – Editor

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Transition Homes

A personal view, or 'How long has this been going on'?

By Dr Jim Carfrae



2006

Totnes was the first 'Transition Town' established in 2006. Shortly after the initial launch, a series of groups were formed to focus on different areas of transition. Among them the Building and Housing group was set up to look at alternative forms of construction and ways to provide more affordable housing for local people.

Inspired by the ethos of transition, and having recently completed the building of my own straw bale 'Eco' house, I joined the early meetings of the Building and Housing group. Unfortunately, due to a personality clash, I stopped attending these meetings fairly soon after...

2010

In my absence, the group set up Transition Homes Community Land Trust (CLT). What is a CLT? – here is a definition from the Community Land Trust Network:

Community land trusts – or CLTs – are democratic, non-profit organisations that own and develop land for the benefit of the community. They typically provide affordable homes, community gardens, civic buildings, pubs, shops, shared workspace, energy schemes and conservation landscapes.

Run by ordinary people. They are community organisations run by ordinary people who want to make a difference to their local community, putting control of assets into the hands of local people. They can be set up by the community or a landowner, developer or council.

Protecting community assets forever. They ensure that their homes are permanently and genuinely affordable. CLTs act as long-term stewards of land and the assets on it. They ensure that it is put to the benefit of the local community, not just for now but for every future occupier.

2013

After some false starts, in 2013 the CLT purchased land at Clay Park in Ashburton Road, Dartington, with the assistance of generous loans from local benefactors, and the process of designing a suitable development for the site began.

2014

At the end of 2014 I heard that there had been changes to the personnel in the CLT and I rejoined as a trustee (the CLT is not-for-profit charity), just in time for the final stages of putting our first planning application together. This application was to provide 23 units of affordable housing and 16 units for the open market and was finally approved in 2017.

2017/18

With planning permission granted, we could start on the details of construction for the project.

Some of the people involved in the CLT had already set up ‘Totnes Sustainable Construction’ (TSC) a local building company initially formed to undertake an ‘Eco’ refurbishment of Dartington Village Hall. Later on I joined with Chris Noakes, a local builder with a firm sustainability agenda, and we became the only two directors of TSC. At this point it was proposed that TSC would run the site following the objectives outlined by the CLT:

‘Skilled local builders assisted by volunteers and potential residents will construct the 27 houses. On the job training will be an integral part of the process, fostering a local skills base. The houses will be made using locally

sourced, natural materials, with minimal use of fossil fuels in the build. They are grouped in terraces for thermal efficiency and lower cost.'

In following this process, you might be thinking 'Isn't this all taking a very long time?' From 2010 to 2018 just to get the initial planning permission?

There are reasons for this, and the two main ones are:

Firstly, this project is run by a group of unpaid volunteers. Most developers would have a large staff of experts working on a project of this size, whereas the trustees of the CLT running this project meet once a week in someone's kitchen whilst also having other jobs.

Secondly, delays in the planning process. The statutory guidance for planning applications is that a decision should be reached within eight weeks of the application being validated by the council. This seldom happens for many reasons, and applications of the scale and complexity of this one can take many months.

This was clearly very frustrating for all concerned, and people who are not directly involved can rightly question the lack of progress – and they do!

So, despite delays, there we were with our ideal set up of local people about to build sustainable homes for local people!

What happened next came as a bit of a shock... It turns out that no-one will finance a scheme of this size unless the development is handed over to a company with a turnover of millions. Apparently, an idealistic construction company run by a couple of aging hippies can't be trusted to deliver 23 houses on time and in budget. They may have had a point – it was a daunting prospect for Chris and myself, but we had put in a great deal of work and research to ensure that we could deliver. So, a 'proper' developer was contracted to build the houses.

It then became clear that the number of 'open market' houses, that would have to be sold in order to subsidise the affordable ones, would have to be increased. Why would we need to build so many open market houses? Surely as a not-for-profit charity we should be able to provide 100% affordable homes? It turned out that with the increasing costs of materials, and limits to the amount of subsidy available from the government it was financially impossible to proceed with the scheme that had planning permission, so it was decided that we must increase the number of open market houses.



2020

We had thought that it might be possible to increase the number of houses as an amendment to the existing permission by keeping them within the same development 'footprint', but the South Hams planners weren't happy with that, so this, of course, means another full planning application for what will be 39 houses and all the further delays and costs that will be associated with that.

2022

In 2022, a new planning permission was granted at last. Because of the delays and increasing costs, new funding was being negotiated.

September 2022 came, and just as the project was close to agreeing the additional funding needed to start work on developing the site, a new prime minister is appointed, and she immediately announces a 'mini budget'. The impact of this budget was to increase the expected interest on our development loans to an unaffordable level, which was devastating news. After all this time, the project appeared to be dead in the water – and in its existing form it was. This is what followed as was explained on the Transition Homes website:

'Thanks to South Hams District Council, discussions are now being held with Aster, a housing association with a 10-year track record of working with community led housing groups. Aster has funding from government grants and its own assets available to invest in the scheme, not only to ensure its viability but also to make all 39 units social rental or shared ownership. The project no longer needs open market houses to sell to provide a cross subsidy. With South Hams having declared a housing crisis locally, this is great news as all the units will be allocated to people in housing need who have a local connection to Dartington, Totnes and the adjacent parishes. Aster is committed to meeting EPC A standards to keep fuel bills low and aims to meet the low carbon build specification as closely as possible to the original plans.

Transition Homes will keep the freehold of the whole site and will be leasing the area occupied by the homes to Aster to build and manage in return for an initial payment to repay its debts and a regular rental. With this, some of the original team will continue to manage the open space for public access, nature restoration and food growing, as well as build and run the community centre to help Clay Park be a resilient, supportive community for all.'

It was excellent news that Aster would be able deliver 100% social rented housing, but galling to discover that because of their size, and the government subsidy that they can call on, they can do what our smaller not-for-profit charity couldn't.

Aster appointed a new contractor called Acheson to build the new homes. It was reassuring that Aster and Acheson were very proactive in working closely with us at the CLT to ensure our continuing involvement in the decision-making process and we took part in many meetings with the main players.

2025

However, the saga didn't end there! You may have noticed if you were passing the site on Clay Lane (opposite Pudavine terrace) a flurry of activity earlier this year as Acheson the contractor finally stated work on site. You might also have noticed that things have gone very quiet recently. This is because Acheson have unexpectedly ceased trading, leaving the project once again on hold.

Although this is yet another interruption in this already lengthy process, Aster, the housing association, are confident that they can find a new contractor to take over. **Watch this space...**

What does TOTSOC do?

Good question. TOTSOC was first registered as a charity on 29 April 1969. Its stated purpose then was:

- (a) To encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in Totnes and the surrounding district.*
- (b) To stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of the town and its surroundings.*
- (c) To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity or historic interest.*
- (d) To pursue these ends by means of meetings, exhibitions, lectures and promotion of schemes of a charitable nature.*

(Extract from 1969 constitution)

Although the constitution has been amended over the years, TOTSOC's purpose remains unchanged. So, what are we doing today?

The committee meets about six times a year and reviews significant planning applications. In the recent past we have engaged with developers and made comments on several larger proposals including:

Dairy Crest Site, Station Road



*Former Dairy Crest Buildings, Station Forecourt –
Welcome to Totnes!*

This site has been vacant since the dairy left over 15 years ago. The Brunel pumping house was listed at the time to prevent its demolition. Totnes Community Development Society secured an option on the site and got a mixed-use redevelopment approved by a community right to

build. Unfortunately, TCDS's option lapsed, and the owners decided to make an
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immediate sale to Fastglobe, who have since obtained an outline consent on appeal to redevelop. TOTSOC has had several discussions with representatives of Fastglobe and made representations at both the planning application stage and the public enquiry at the appeal stage. The current consent is in outline only so much of the detail has still to be developed and submitted for detailed planning approval. TOTSOC will continue to monitor the project and expects to make further comments once the detailed design proposals are published. More immediately TOTSOC is urging the local authority to take action to force Fastglobe to properly secure the site and remove the burnt-out vehicle that is adjacent to the station forecourt.

Baltic Wharf (Phases 1 and 2)

TOTSOC had extensive involvement in the detailed consultation process that preceded the construction of the first phase of this development. It facilitated the provision of benches on the winding footpath above the site and the construction of a play area.



Baltic Wharf from Steamer Quay – Parts of the proposed development will rise above the skyline

Consultations on the second phase began in a similar manner to the first phase but the new developer, Acorn Properties quickly decided to go for a token consultation (more of an advertising exercise) that did not really seek to take in local comments. The proposal put forward was much larger than envisaged at the time of Phase 1 and raised many objections, including from TOTSOC. Objections ranged from inadequate boat yard provision, excessively tall buildings and lack of affordable housing. In January this year, the planners refused the scheme, and it is understood that Acorn will appeal the decision, which they must do within six months.

Proposed Care Home, Steamer Quay Road

TOTSOC does not usually get involved in individual planning applications that do not involve listed buildings. However, in response to a request from a local resident, TOTSOC did make representation to the planning authority about the apparent failure of the developer to provide accurate drawings on certain features of the proposed building. Although the original consent for the scheme was granted in 2018 the project has still not commenced.

Normally a planning consent must be implemented within three years, after which it will lapse. However, there is a 'wrinkle' in planning law that provides that a planning consent is implemented if a 'material operation' is commenced within



*Site of proposed Care Home above Steamer Quay –
where's the 'material operation'?*

the three-year period. Such operations can be quite minor and are often not obvious once completed. These could include the laying of drains or a short section of foundation. It may be that this consent has been kept alive by such a process.

Looking forward, TOTSOC intends to start a systematic monitoring of all

listed building applications together with planning applications for larger projects. This may provide material for a short but more frequent update to our members.

We would also like to hear from our members on any building matter that you feel we should be looking at or topic that you would like the committee to address.

1950s Totnes Castle Dig revisited

By Kate Wilson

In 1947 Totnes Castle wasn't open to the public, had a large tree growing in the Keep and the Bailey was being used as a tennis court. The Seymour family placed the Castle under the care of the Ministry of Works who felled the tree and started excavating the Keep as a precursor to opening the Castle to the public. It was an opportunity to find the true ground level under centuries of rubble and learn some historical information. Excavation work was carried out under the guidance of Stuart E Rigold, Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments with the Ministry of Works. By 1953, Rigold and his team had cleared the enclosure of the Keep. As well as the stone footing of a watchtower, which is visible today, a significant number of finds were unearthed revealing several phases of human occupation throughout the Castle's history.

The most important portable finds were catalogued and given to Totnes Museum by Rigold. Some of these finds are currently on display in the Museum. These include a 12th century morse (walrus) ivory seal carved with a bird on one side and Sigillum Alfredi (Alfred's Seal) carved on the other and a 12th century morse ivory gaming piece shaped like an octagonal thimble. Also on display is a fine, grey sandstone, spindle whorl, a Roman Flue tile - which might indicate a Roman habitation site somewhere in the vicinity - and various pottery sherds glazed and unglazed, some locally produced and some imported.

Rigold had described his finds in the 1954 vol 86 Transactions of the Devonshire Association entitled "Totnes Castle: Recent Excavation by the Ancient Monuments Department, Ministry of Works". As well as the items the Museum has on display, Rigold mentioned pottery sherds from fine ware and cooking pots, metal goods, tiles, slates, nails, coins and animal bones.

It wasn't until one of the university placement students at the Museum became interested in the Castle Dig that we found out that there has been very little written about the Castle Dig since this 1954 report. We also found, perhaps more significantly, that all the portable finds from the Castle Dig are in the Museum. Some we knew were on display, but it meant that there were a huge number of finds in storage. At this point it must have been fate that sent Mallory Haas, an archaeologist with the Ships Project in Plymouth, in our direction.

Mallory visited the Museum and looked at the Castle Dig items on display. She spent a long time looking and making observations about sherds and dates. Our knowledge of pottery sherds has increased significantly since the 1950s and Mallory was very excited to learn that there were more finds in storage which hadn't been checked for some time.

Our database indicated which boxes we should look at and we went up to the attic storage area to locate them. There are hundreds of boxes in the attic, and they are not all where the database says they are, but fortunately most of the Castle Dig finds were in boxes of a similar age and style so they were relatively easy to locate. One box that said "Castle Dig items - not yet accessioned" piqued Mallory's interest. The number of boxes containing Castle Dig finds indicated that we would need to look at them all and that a systematic approach was needed. Mallory said she'd return the following week. Volunteers set about clearing a space in the Mitchell room in which to work.

One by one boxes were brought downstairs and put on tables and one by one they were unpacked systematically. There were lots of plastic bags. In some cases, the pottery sherds probably hadn't been looked at since the 1950s – they hadn't even been cleaned when they were taken out of the ground, just bagged ready for further examination. Some bags had been looked at and catalogued. There were plastic bags of pottery sherds that had the original 1950s labels with them explaining what they might be. There were bags of pottery sherds with writing on them indicating where in the Dig area they had been found - this is invaluable as without this information on the object the detective work to link sherds together would have been much greater, though marking techniques have improved since the 1950s. There were some pottery sherds that had



Glazed ware – possibly 12th Century



Decorated ware

Museum reference numbers on them which can be traced to Rigold's 1954 paper which is exciting. Some pieces are handles from jugs or amphora, some are rims of cooking pots, some are locally made and some not. There's an awful lot we know very little about. In all, there are hundreds of sherds and it's not certain that all the boxes have been found – Rigold recorded a large number of animal bones and nails that haven't surfaced.

So far, we have unearthed more information about excavations at the Castle dating from the 1990s but there is

nothing from the 1950s Dig other than Rigold's paper which makes the whole project very exciting – we have an incredible opportunity to re-examine the Castle Dig. We're still finding out what we have, cleaning finds and grouping them.

The next part of the process is to apply for a grant so that we can continue the work of recording and classifying the finds, working with consultants and then making what we've found available to the public.

It's great to be working with professionals who can guide us and who have links to other professionals who can share their knowledge and give advice. We've been handed a unique opportunity to work with finds that haven't been properly assessed before – there are very few museums that offer this hands-on experience to volunteers! Come and join us! (email chair@totnesmuseum.org for information on volunteering).



Floor tile



Totnes Museum opens to the public for the 2025 season on Tuesday April 1st and thereafter on Tuesdays and Fridays 10.30am until 4.30pm until the end of October.

Ukrainian Action's "*Team Devon*"

– helping a country in dire need

By Neil Millward

Britain is widely recognised as the most active and persistent nation in helping Ukraine through voluntary work and Ukrainian Action is one of the leading charities. A UK registered charity, no. 1202133, and a US registered charity, it is dedicated to the survival and recovery of the Ukrainian people. It does this by acquiring and donating utility vehicles to known contacts in Ukraine, delivering them in convoys driven by volunteers. To date it has delivered 350 vehicles in over 70 convoys, mostly pickup trucks packed with humanitarian aid, particularly generators and medical equipment.

In early 2023 two Stoke Gabriel retirees (Neil Millward and Anthony Showell) volunteered as drivers for Ukrainian Action and were quickly joined by five other local volunteer drivers – thus *Team Devon* was born. They soon raised over £15,000 by appealing to friends and family and had three vehicles donated by friends. In March 2023 the seven *Team Devon* drivers joined a Ukrainian Action convoy from London to Poland; from there, other Ukrainian Action volunteers took the vehicles on to Ukraine.

Over the following year *Team Devon* expanded to 25 drivers and had joined numerous Ukrainian Action convoys from London. Latterly they have organised and run seven convoys of their own, each with five or so vehicles, starting from Stoke Gabriel. As usual, the drivers have paid for the fuel, their accommodation *en route* and their flight home.

Through events such as tabletop sales, ceilidhs and talks, and activities such as harvesting, processing and selling firewood, *Team Devon* have raised over £130,000 and have funded or accepted and delivered 35 vehicles, including the much loved “Rozeroo” donated by the Stoke Gabriel Postmistress. None of this would have happened without the great support of the local community. It sustains the team’s commitment to help the Ukrainian people in their existential fight against the brutal Russian invaders. They greatly appreciate all the support that they get.

Sadly, Ukraine’s need for their efforts continues. You can help them to help Ukraine in various ways: joining Ukraine Action as a volunteer driver and asking to be put in touch with Team Devon; a cash donation in their collecting boxes in the Stoke Gabriel Village Stores or the Dart Gallery; a donation on their crowdfunding page at www.justgiving.com/page/uateamdevon; the donation of (or information leading to) a pick-up truck costing less than £2,000; or the donation of a generator or medical equipment. With your support they hope to put together their next convoy April 2025.

For further information please contact me, Neil Millward, Volunteer Driver,
Ukrainian Action on
01803 782981, neilandpam72@gmail.com



Lunchtime stop before handover in Poland



Team Devon, handing over in Poland

The TOTSOC Committee

The current TOTSOC Committee Members are:

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Paul Bennett	paulbennett1935@gmail.com
Tom King – Secretary and Minute Secretary	totsoc@gmail.com
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Kate Wilson – Planning Officer	katewilsondeane@gmail.com
Rod Hewett – Contact Editor	rod@thehewetts.co.uk

Please encourage your friends and neighbours to join TOTSOC

Thank you, our loyal members for your continued support for TOTSOC: it is much appreciated by the Committee. Sadly, several loyal members have passed away in the last few years and we have done little to encourage others to join. Whilst our running costs are very low, we do have some costs, such as printing this publication.

The Committee would be grateful if you could do something to [encourage your friends and neighbours to join](#). As you know, the annual fee paid by standing order is just £5 or £8 for a couple. The application form is on the website at totsoc.org.uk. We have printed some extra copies of this edition, so just let me know if you would like one or more additional copies for you to hand round to potential members.

Jeremy Logie