

TOTNES has been on yurt alert. This traditional dwelling straight from the steppes of central Asia suddenly appeared in the middle of Borough Park.

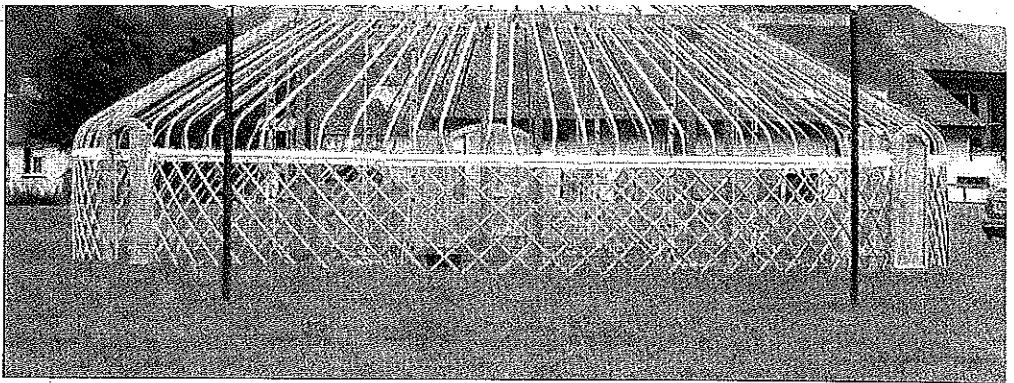
It was snapped by keen photographer Dick Evans, who wondered whether Totnes Rugby Club was taking on a touring side from Mongolia.

Not so, apparently. South Hams Council was quickly able to clear up the mystery.

A spokesman explained: 'A local company asked if they could test the construction of their biggest yurt in Borough Park, as their usual site was out of use.'

'We gave them permission to do so and the yurt was constructed for a couple of hours on Wednesday last week.'

By the way, the word 'yurt' is actually from the Turkish, and Mongolians would say that they live in a 'ger'.



Who lives in a house like this? The yurt that suddenly appeared in Borough Park

Contributed

Campaigners to stand firm over zone threat

THE campaign to protect the market heart of Totnes from being turned into a building site for new homes is not going to go away, district council bosses have been warned.

Last month more than 500 people marched through the town centre to protest about plans to zone part of the town centre - including the market square, the Leechwell Garden and most of the town's public car parks - for the possible development of up to 70 new homes.

And a lot more will be marching again if some way is not found to boot a controversial town centre zone right out of the South Hams Council local plan debate, warned campaigner Paul Wesley.

Last week Mr Wesley called on local councillors to sort out some sort of process by which the controversial town centre zone, most of which is owned by South Hams Council, can be excluded from the joint local plan currently being considered by the district council.

'This campaign will not go away,' he insisted. 'Five hundred people came out onto the streets of Totnes within a week of knowing about it. A lot more will be coming out in the town if necessary.'

The row over the town centre area, zoned as T3 Totnes Central Area in the district's joint local plan document, flared up earlier this year when townspeople realised that the marketplace, the Leechwell Garden and all the neighbouring council car parks had been zoned as a possible site for development involving up to 70 new homes.

Despite claims from the district council that protestors have been simply whipping up unfounded rumours, the campaign has been gathering weight, with a petition having been signed by more than 3,400 people.

Currently Totnes district councillor Robert Vint is trying to get the market square and Leechwell Garden protected as assets of community value and to

register the garden as a 'local green space'.

Cllr Vint revealed that the market could well be protected by an ancient charter, which he is trying to track down.

Meanwhile, both local Liberal Democrat and Green Party district councillors are pressing for the T3 zone to be removed from the joint local plan and handed over to the neighbourhood planning team to make a community-led decision over what kind of development can occur in the zone and where, with the approval of a town referendum.

The Greens have gone one step further and declared that, if the controversial town centre area stays within the district council local plan, then the area should be split up and zoned individually with 'design information', so people can see just what could be possible for each part of the area.

Green councillors Jacqui Hodgson and John Green said that, as far as they are concerned, the only areas with

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any potential for redevelopment are 'two small areas at either side of the civic hall car park outside of car parking spaces, along with the red-brick building and rear of Birdwood House, plus a potential elevated space above Heath's middle car park, where some innovative small housing units could be accommodated - neither of these options would reduce car parking'.

They added that 'these kind of options could be considered and consulted on through the Totnes Neighbourhood Plan'.

Meanwhile, Totnes Neighbourhood Plan coordinator Mary Coughlan-Clarke revealed that her team had looked at all 1,044 comments made in response to the entire South Hams and West Devon joint local plan's initial consultation exercise, which

ended in August, and found that 465 - a little under half - referred to the Totnes and Dartington section of the plan, and half of those were about T3.

Mr Wesley told town councillors that campaigners wanted to know what process was in place to get the T3 zone removed from the joint local plan. He pointed out that it was not clear just what weight was being given to people's comments in the recent consultation exercise and any to follow.

'If 100 per cent of the population says they don't want it, it doesn't mean that carries any weight,' he warned.

Totnes district councillor John Green warned that, while it was possible to remove the T3 area from the local plan process, it had been included in the previous local plan and there was a 'momentum for it to stay'.

He also warned that there was a 'need to make sure that the potential vested interest of the South Hams Council assets team does not hold sway'.

Councillor: three-month wait for T3 intel

TOTNES will not find out if the town's market heart is still up for development grabs for at least another three months, one leading district councillor has said.

Cabinet councillor Michael Hicks was faced with a barrage of questions over the town centre T3 central area site in the local plan. This includes the market square and neighbouring car parks, which has been zoned for a possible development of up to 70 new homes.

He said the preparation of the plan would conclude sometime in early 2017 and that it would not be known until then what would or would not be included.

He said: 'All those concerned can be assured that during the remaining process, any subsequent potential

planning will be subject to a whole load of consultation and design before any decisions are made and our interest would be enhancement - nothing less. Having plans does not mean a decision has been made.'

At a meeting of the district council's overview and scrutiny committee, Cllr Hicks was faced with eight separate questions from campaigner Georgina Allen in the public question section of the meeting.

They included a demand to know the 'precise steps' for getting the T3 zone kicked out of the local plan process and calls for the council to justify 'selling assets against the wishes of the community'.

Ms Allen also wanted to know why market traders had been told that none of the square would be built on,

'when they have plans for commercial units on the front and 20 houses on the back'.

She also asked how the T3 site could be left in the joint local plan if that resulted in the community neighbourhood plan in Totnes failing to get through the necessary town referendum.

Cllr Hicks told the meeting: 'We believe the neighbourhood plan will not fail in Totnes.'

'The members of the group are responsible residents of Totnes and I'm sure they will represent their findings accurately.'

'The aspiration of this council has always been to support the furthering of the town centre amenity and operation subject to the necessary funding.'

'Indeed, the development of the town centre over the past 20 years or so has been facilitated by this council in conjunction with local organisations and the town council.'

He said the district council was supportive of having a market square in the centre of Totnes, adding: 'It's wrong to assume that the figures inserted in the local plan, such as the 70 in T3, refer to houses per se. What we talk about when considering possible numbers on individual sites is dwellings. It's incorrect to refer to this as a target - it's just a possibility for consideration.'

'As the local planning authority, we have given many assurances about the feared loss of car parking spaces in Totnes. Car parking provision in Totnes centre will not be lost.'