

## The Totnes Neighbourhood Plan – the Vision and Objectives

A Neighbourhood Plan needs a Vision and Objectives in order to lay out what the Plan, as a whole, is trying to achieve. Before this can be done, it is also vital to capture the essence of Totnes as the foundation for the Plan.

Totnes needs a Neighbourhood Plan because it is an unusually strong and distinctive Market town. This is partly due to its history, and partly due to how it functions or 'works' now as an internationally recognised centre for environmental awareness and action, an important cultural, historic and employment centre, and as a fantastic place to live. Future planning decisions need to respect this and make the best of it so that new development provides opportunities for Totnes to become stronger and better still, not undermining it.

A Neighbourhood Plan means that planning decisions will be based on better informed and more detailed policies than if Totnes were only covered by the Local Plan for the whole of South Hams, West Devon and Plymouth.

### What is Special About Totnes?

Totnes is a desirable place to live, popular place to work, has a well-deserved reputation as a special place, and attracts many visitors. Totnes is proud of its distinctiveness and success – the town is well known for its commitment to and implementation of sustainable development and all of the features and characteristics this fosters. There is a concern, though, that past planning decisions have not properly appreciated or supported this.

The historic core of the town is probably its most familiar feature to residents and visitors. The medieval street pattern, castle, numerous Listed Buildings and other heritage features play a big part in the Town's sense of place. Totnes's location at the lowest crossing point on the River Dart, since the thirteenth century, has always been significant to how it functions as a market town. It brings people to and through the town, but also causes traffic congestion which undermines the quality of the town's environment.

The River is also a huge asset to the town, although it is currently undervalued and underused. The River Dart greatly contributes to the environmental quality of the Town and there is a great opportunity to make much more of it, not least by creating a 'River Park' running through the middle of the town.

The landscape setting of the town is also a critical dimension of its character – the town is surrounded by hills, contributing to its intimate feel. If development overruns these hills a central aspect of the town's identity will be lost. This emphasises the point that there are obvious environmental limits to the expansion of Totnes, and so the limited development opportunities need to be used wisely, to the greatest benefit of the town.

Totnes, unlike any of the other six 'Area Centres'<sup>1</sup> designated in the emerging Joint Local Plan, is a true employment centre, attracting many more people in to work than the number of workers living there<sup>2</sup>, despite also being highly attractive to commuters to larger centres such as Exeter and Plymouth. This is a key strength of the town that needs to be understood and planned for. The same is true for the retail offer of the town, particularly its centre, where the preponderance of independent shops, cafes and restaurants does much to give Totnes a unique retail and service edge, which is intimately linked to the physical form of the town.

Totnes also has a well-deserved reputation as a cultural and environmental centre. It is a centre for the arts and 'alternative' lifestyle activities, greatly helped by its proximity to Dartington, including many aspects of spiritual life, food culture, and ethical issues. It is home to the Transition movement, and well known for championing environmental sustainability, innovation and experimentation. It is also the base for many educational groups and events covering all of the above. These characteristics are partly only possible because the population of the town is unusually active and engaged in a wide spectrum of local activities and issues. All of this creates many opportunities for furthering these important aspects of local identity, but also puts down a marker that this is an 'edge' which Totnes must not lose.

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1 Dartmouth, Ivybridge, Kingsbridge, Okehampton, Tavistock and Totnes

2 this is not the case for any of the other five area centres

This Plan captures what sustainable development means for Totnes – anchored in the need for environmental sustainability but sufficiently broad and deep that the needs of the whole community are met and the local economy strengthened.

Overall this means that Totnes is a different sort of place – unique in Devon and more widely, with a national and international reputation which residents, businesses and visitors cherish. A central task for the Neighbourhood Plan is to make sure that new development makes the best of this, understanding that if done wrongly it could diminish the compelling success of the town over centuries. Totnes needs to take control of its future and the Neighbourhood Plan provides an opportunity to do this.

The numerous strengths of the town also raise challenges. There is a lot of demand to live in Totnes, which means that house prices are high, pressure for development is strong, and there is a large unmet need for affordable housing. This, in turn, creates particular problems for younger people and families and older households, who can struggle to meet their housing needs, either for affordable housing or open market housing. This, in turn, means that there is a difficulty attracting and retaining young people and families to and in the town.

The congestion the town suffers impairs its functioning efficiently at times and also causes a local air pollution problem. We also know that in some areas of the town there are problems accessing 'everyday' goods, services and facilities, that the town's educational facilities are in need of improvement, and that despite the strength of the local economy there are low wage and part time problems, which then feed back into the housing issues already mentioned.

The Plan will also reflect that the town is made up of a number of distinctive areas - the Town Core, Bridgetown, Plymouth Road / Follaton and the Northern Quarter – and, where necessary, seek different outcomes for them to further their individual sustainability, and that of the town as a whole

## Vision, Objectives, Policies

The **Vision** for the Plan sets out what we are, and also what we want to become.

The **Objectives** are the most important things we need to do in order to achieve the **Vision**.

The detailed **Policies** of the Plan lay out how we will fulfil the **Objectives**.

This means that the Plan has to start with its **Vision** and **Objectives**, and that **Policies** are the mechanisms by which the Plan does its work. **Policies** will often support more than one **Objective**.

## Vision - What Should the Totnes Neighbourhood Plan Achieve?

It is essential that the Totnes Neighbourhood Plan (TNP) fully captures the unique and distinctive nature of the town, and ensures that all of its special qualities are maintained and enhanced through the policies in the plan. In short the TNP has to make sure that as it grows Totnes keeps its treasured identity, and becomes an even better place for its residents, businesses and visitors, both in terms of the nature of the new development permitted, and how the management of the town as a whole benefits from it.

Achieving sustainable development is a central objective for the planning system, and also for Totnes. There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. National Policy<sup>3</sup> is clear that these three dimensions have to be achieved together, and that the planning system should achieve economic, social and environmental gains jointly and simultaneously.

This approach is at the heart of the TNP. We are already an exemplar for the pursuit of sustainable development and the Plan will expand and extend this. The Plan has three main pillars:

- Environment
- Community
- Economy.

These reflect the three dimensions of sustainable development. The Plan also has three cross-cutting themes:

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3 The National Planning Policy Framework (2012)

- Transport & Movement
- Health & Wellbeing
- Community Led & Owned.

Transport & Movement is the way we join everything up, affecting everything. Getting transport in Totnes more sustainable and reducing its harmful impacts is important.

Health and wellbeing are things the town is already well known for, and are essential to protect and ensure that everybody benefits from. All planning decisions need to take account of this.

The town is already leading the way in community led and owned projects such as Atmos and Transition Homes. These are both examples of how the community can get more out of new development by leading and owning it through vehicles such as community land trusts. The plan aims to build on and spread this success.

Taken together the three pillars and three cross-cutting themes make up the Vision for the Totnes Neighbourhood Plan. We have taken this fuller approach to setting our vision so that the vision can be instrumental in setting the direction the Plan intends Totnes to take, rather than being a statement of more generalised intent.

How the pillars and cross-cutting themes interrelate is shown in the Vision Diagram overleaf.

## Environment

The Plan will

- support and extend Totnes' pioneering approach to sustainable development and local resilience, reducing the environmental impacts of the town, including of energy generation and use, resource consumption, waste production, air and water pollution. It will take every opportunity to mitigate and adapt for climate change, and enhance local environmental capacity. Overall, the town is seeking transition to true environmental sustainability, in which new development has a prominent role
- protect and, where possible, enhance the landscape setting of the town, and its valuable formal and informal open spaces, including the River Dart
- build on and protect the distinctive historic character of the town as a whole and its many significant buildings, streets, squares and the wider public realm, not only for their own sake, but also for their vital importance to the identity and heritage of the town as a whole
- ensure that the most sustainable use is made of land for development, and that the environmental impact of new development is minimised, and where possible positive.

## Community

The Plan will:

- support the vitality and diversity of the Totnes community, by making sure that its needs are met and create new opportunities to build on the strengths of the community
- support and enhance the town's important and distinctive cultural and service roles, and the way in which they combine (with retail premises) to create a place which is much more than just the sum of its physical attributes
- seek to ensure that new housing meets the widest possible needs of the local population, prioritising the provision of affordable homes for young people, families and the growing numbers of older people.

## Economy

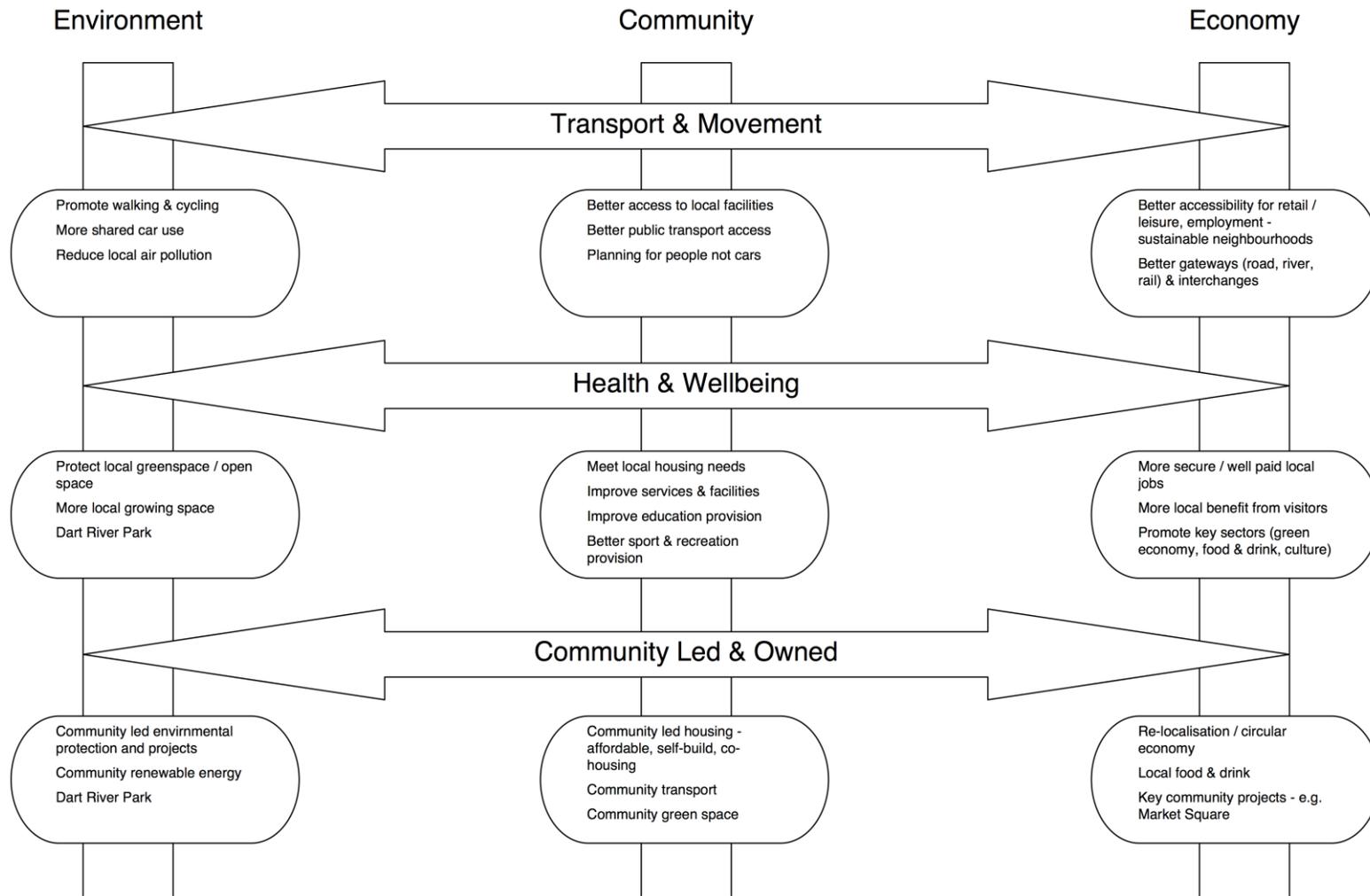
The Plan will:

- support and extend the strength, variety and distinctiveness which characterise the thriving local economy.
- support and enhance the town's strongly independent retail sector role as a visitor destination and the associated hospitality sector, and the way in which these spatially combine (with cultural and

service facilities) to create a place which is much more than just its physical attributes

- specifically encourage and support 'green' and 'ethical' businesses as an existing strength of the town, and their local networks and clusters
- support the improvement of existing business space and the provision of a diversity of new business space to meet the needs of a growing local economy.

# Vision Diagram



## Transport & Movement

The Plan will:

- support reducing the likelihood of travel through the location, nature and design of development, and also making best use of more sustainable modes, contributing to a more sustainable and effective local transport network for the town and its hinterland
- will prioritise walking and cycling as the preferred modes of transport within the town whilst ensuring that the needs of those unable to use these modes are met
- will also prioritise the use of public and community transport as alternative more sustainable modes of transport
- ensure that the use of existing car parking and provision of new car parking best supports both the local economy and the needs of residents and visitors, and the use of more sustainable modes and use of transport.

## Health & Wellbeing

The Plan will:

- maintain and enhance the wellbeing of all residents, employees and visitors, recognising that this is already a distinctive positive feature of Totnes
- encourage and support measures to reduce the impact of vehicular traffic on the local environment, and on health, wellbeing and amenity.

## Community Led & Owned

The Plan will:

- support community-led development and community asset ownership as locally important ways of achieving sustainable development
- support alternative economic models such as re-localisation, and social- and community-supported-enterprise as important dimensions of the local economy
- identify and promote sustainable neighbourhoods within the town so that communities can meet more of their needs within their local neighbourhood.

## Objectives

The Plan can only directly address new development<sup>4</sup>, which includes the building projects and changes of use which require planning applications, which the Plan's policies will then be used to determine. It can influence other things, such as transport, schools or health decisions, but does not have direct control over these.

The following Objectives are the most important things the Plan needs to do to deliver the Vision, and which the Plan's policies will address.

## Environment

**New Development** – all new development will minimise environmental impacts and maximise environmental benefits in construction and use. This will include:

- maximising the embodied energy and thermal efficiency, and minimising the energy use of buildings – on-site renewable energy use is strongly supported
- minimising the production of waste from and use of water in development
- minimising the environmental impacts of changes of use, including on air and water quality
- supporting the production and consumption of local food, including growing, processing, and selling.

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<sup>4</sup> Development is legally defined by Section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

**Landscape and the Natural Environment** – all new development will maintain or enhance the quality of the local landscape, within and surrounding the town, and will maintain or enhance local biodiversity and biocapacity. This will include taking account of the attributes of individual sites, the roles sites play in networks, and the landscape and natural environment of the parish as a whole. The River Dart is of particular importance as it has the potential to provide a green connection between important parts of the town, some of which the plan advocates redeveloping, and also to create a 'River Park'.

**Public Open Spaces** - the Plan will maintain and enhance the provision, quality and diversity of public open spaces and recreational provision in the Parish, including:

- formal and informal space for sport, recreation and play
- amenity green spaces, spaces for nature conservation, and greenways
- growing space
- civic spaces, cemeteries and graveyards
- spaces allowing access to the River Dart.

**Historic Character and Heritage** – all new development will maintain or enhance the historic character and Heritage of the town. This includes:

- Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and other Designated Heritage Assets
- other non-designated buildings and built features or spaces that have particular roles or significance in the historic character, heritage or cultural heritage of the town
- understanding that change is a feature of history and culture, and that improvement and alteration of buildings can support wider heritage and cultural benefits.

**Sustainable Use of Land** – opportunities for development in Totnes are not unlimited, and it is therefore a priority for the Plan and for sustainable development to make the best use of all land available for development. This includes:

- making best use of opportunities for redevelopment of existing buildings and previously developed land
- ensuring that the density of development makes the best use of the sites whilst being in-keeping with all other objectives of the Plan
- mixing development to make the best use of a site by responding to its character and features in terms of both the site itself, neighbouring development, and its location in the town.

## Community

**The Community** – all new development will have positive impacts on the Totnes community, supporting its vitality, diversity and self-reliance.

**Housing** – a priority of the Plan is meeting local housing needs rather than satisfying demand for housing, as the capacity for new housing in the parish is finite. This includes:

- meeting known needs for housing in terms of size, tenure and affordability
- specifically increasing the number of smaller homes to meet the needs of local young and older people
- supporting innovative and community-led approaches to the delivery of housing.

All new housing development should support sustainable development through the detail of its design, features and materials.

**Services and Cultural Facilities** – all new development will maintain or enhance the community services and facilities of the parish. This will include:

- specific services and facilities of importance to local residents, businesses and visitors
- opportunities for new services and facilities which will improve the breadth, depth and distinctiveness of overall provision in the parish.

## Economy

**The Local Economy** – Totnes is an important economic, employment and market centre for its own residents and those from a wide surrounding area. All new development will maintain or enhance the strength and diversity of the local economy which is based in the town, either directly or indirectly.

The town is also an important visitor destination and all new development will maintain or enhance this specific economic role also.

**Retail and Hospitality** – a priority for the Plan is to support the distinctive and strongly independent retail and hospitality sector on the town. This includes:

- maintaining and enhancing the diversity of retail and hospitality units in terms of size and distribution across the town
- maintaining and enhancing the town's many markets
- **maintaining and enhancing the strength and identity of the core of the town as a whole.**

**Education & Training** - the Plan will support meeting the training and education needs of the residents of the town and the local economy, especially those for younger people, and knowledge- and skills-based enterprise.

**Green Economy** – a priority for the Plan is to support the 'green' and 'ethical' businesses – existing and new - which existing characteristics of the local economy. This includes:

- supporting their networks and clusters
- supporting start-ups and innovation
- supporting the local 'circular economy'<sup>5</sup> and local food economy.

**Alternative Economic Models** - the Plan will support alternative economic models which enhance the sustainability of the local economy. This includes:

- re-localisation – making it easier for local residents and businesses to meet their needs for goods and services locally
- social and community-supported enterprise – businesses which specifically trade to tackle social problems, improve communities, people's life chances, or the environment.

## Transport

**More Sustainable Transport** – the Plan prioritises reducing the likelihood of travel<sup>6</sup> and the use of more sustainable modes of transport where necessary. It will do this directly by ensuring that new development is located and designed to reduce the likelihood of travel, make best use of more sustainable modes, and contributes to a more sustainable and effective local transport network for the town as a whole. This includes recognising the significance of the town location as a railhead for the whole of the South Hams and the importance of improving its transport gateways.

Alongside this it is essential to reduce and mitigate the effects of congestion, and work to maximise coordination with transport planning for the town and surrounding area.

New development should improve the local transport network, not make it worse.

**Walking and Cycling** - the Plan prioritises walking and cycling as the preferred modes of sustainable transport within the town. This includes:

- ensuring that new development maintains or enhances the walking and cycling network of the town as a whole

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5 <http://www.wrap.org.uk/>

6 planning has often targeted reducing the 'need to travel', but this has often failed as people have tended to travel nonetheless, as they are more responsive to aspects such as ease or cost of travel. Likelihood is a more demanding test. The most sustainable mode of transport, according to Douglas Adams, being one you can't use, and therefore reducing travel full stop is a valid sustainability objective, and directly linked to re-localisation

- requiring that new development is well connected or made well connected to the walking and cycling network of the town
- requiring that new development specifically supports cycling through cycle parking provision and changing facilities
- ensuring that new development maintains or enhances road safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

**Community and Public Transport** - the plan also prioritises the use of public and community transport as alternative more sustainable modes of transport. This includes:

- ensuring that new development maintains or enhances the public and community transport network of the town as a whole
- requiring that new development is easily accessible or made easily accessible from the public and community transport network of the town
- promoting shared car use.

**Car Parking** - the Plan recognises the importance of car parking to the overall functional sustainability of the town, despite the inherently less sustainable nature of travel by private car. It will therefore ensure that the use of existing car parking and provision of new car parking best supports both the local economy and the needs of the local community, and the use of more sustainable modes and use of transport in terms of its pricing, use and location. This includes:

- managing existing car parking and providing and locating new car parking to best support sustainable development and the other objectives of the Plan
- meeting the parking needs of car clubs, electric vehicles and other more sustainable ways of utilising private cars.

## Health & Wellbeing

All new development will be expected to have positive impacts on the well-being of Totnes residents, employees and visitors. This will be achieved through:

- greater opportunities to access open and green spaces of all types, including the River Dart
- greater opportunities to grow and consume local food
- meeting local needs for housing, services & facilities, education and sport and recreation
- increasing the security and quality of local jobs
- supporting key sectors of the local economy by making greater contributions to wellbeing
- reducing the harmful impact of traffic congestion.

## Community Led & Owned

A priority of the Plan is supporting community asset ownership and community led development as alternative and effective ways of achieving sustainable development. The Plan will therefore favour these approaches where they would result in greater sustainable development benefits. This will include through community led, owned & managed:

- affordable, self-build and eco-housing
- open and green space
- transport initiatives
- renewable energy projects
- economic re-localisation initiatives
- key community projects – e.g The Market Square
- local food & drink projects.

