

Feedback from community consultation on 22nd February

Thanks for your feedback – which we welcome, whether positive or negative. It's important for us to know what others in the community think. Below is public feedback (in **bold**) and our responses to queries/concerns (in *italics*). We really appreciate your words of support; it's not been an easy journey! If you want to see any of the documents (ecological surveys etc) submitted to the council with the planning application, please follow this [link](#).

“Brilliant – keep going. Great designs”

“Inspiring. Hopeful. Thank you. Good for my heart”

“Wow! Amazing project and so needed. Keep up the good work”

“How are they heated?” Apologies if this wasn't on one of the posters. The whole scheme is heated electrically. Although electricity is an expensive fuel, the houses are very energy efficient and therefore the amount of electricity needed is small. The government is phasing out gas boilers in new housing and the use of coal and wet wood fuel in stoves (and we wonder if oil for heating may follow), which may be indicative of a strategic move to electricity as a primary source of heating (we hope an increase in renewable electricity generate will go hand in hand with this). Hot water will come from the solar PV array during the summer and shoulder season. The scheme will have a renewable energy supplier and a microgrid for electricity, to maximise the use of the electricity generates by the PV on site, rather than exporting to the grid. We're working with Tresoc on this, and they are exploring the viability of battery storage too which would further improve our ability to use our own electricity.”

“I live in Laburnum Grove and am concerned about the wildlife in the field: stoats, sparrowhawks, owls (tawny, barn, little), pheasants, deer, fox, insects, bats, and also light & noise pollution, and overlooking into my house”.

We had a long conversation, with discussion of many valid concerns which have also been raised by other neighbours over the years and some of which we have tried to address in our plans (for example, not building up to the boundary with Laburnum Grove in order to maintain privacy, and not shade the gardens). We share many of the concerns – for example human impact on the environment and the ecological impact of development. In an ideal world we wouldn't be building on a greenfield site, however this was what was available to us and we are trying to make the best of what we have (land availability is very challenging around Totnes, and the only brownfield site have been or are being developed including the former mills in Dartington, the former Dairy Crest site adjacent to Totnes station, and the former DCC social services building in Bridgetown).

We had various ecological surveys undertaken, and these were submitted with the planning application and considered by the council ecologist. There are no protected species living at Clay Park, however we don't believe species should have to be protected by law in order to consider them – and we are leaving part of the site undeveloped, and creating new habitats (orchard, wildflower meadow) and maintaining others (restoring hedgebank, hedgelaying, and creating new hedgebank to connect up the existing banks and create wildlife corridors). The goal is to minimise negative impact, and to have a positive impact if possible through creating habitat. We weren't aware of

stoats on site as these weren't identified in the surveys, and we'll raise this with our ecologist to discuss how best to protect the species which you've mentioned.

Light pollution is important in not disturbing wildlife (particularly bats and other nocturnal animals) and we have considered this in our lighting design, minimising light spill so as not to disturb the bats, and again this has been approved by the council ecologist. DCC Highways have requirements for lighting for the adopted road (access into the site), for safety, and we have to comply with this but we're not putting any lighting in the lanes, to try and minimise light pollution.

Noise pollution – this regards the behaviour of the new residents, in which we are limited in what we can control, however we expect a minimum level of respectful behaviour from the residents regarding their neighbours (both on and off site) including for example not making noise between 11pm and 7am (for example parties or amplified music).

“Please think of us for your next projects, we would love to quote and get the opportunity to design & supply one of our passivhaus schemes. Please also consider using MVHR system of ventilation – it does more than keep a constant temperature, it also provides clean healthy air”.

We will definite consider passive house as an option for future schemes. The technology has come a long way since we started designing Clay Park, when we chose not to design a passive house scheme, and chose to keep the technology required to a minimum. We do agree that ventilation and good internal air quality is important and this has been discussed and ventilation designed into the scheme.

“The information and explanation provided on the reasons for amending the scheme is very clear. It's a pity that the aspirations reflected in the approved scheme were not underpinned with sufficient research into infrastructure and build costs to allow the proposal to proceed. The CLT is now having to behave like a commercial developer and come back asking for more. My concern is the precedent that this sets – what is to stop you coming back again? This rather undermines credibility. Looking at the proposed amendment I think you have done your best not to increase the footprint of the scheme significantly. This is a site which intrudes into the green gap between Totnes and Dartington and it sets a dangerous precedent which private developers will try to use in the future. Keeping the impact of the development on the landscape to a minimum is vital. I think you have just about achieved it but only just. In making your revised application I think you need to justify what you are now proposing by looking at various options so SHDC and the community can come to an informed conclusion. Options I would suggest include:

- 1) Could you keep the same number of homes and vary the private/co-ownership and affordable mix to achieve viability? Why not reduce co-ownership and increase private?**
- 2) Could you look again at the environmental elements and why not just aim for net zero carbon rather than passivhaus?**
- 3) Some combination of 1 and 2**

You are dependent on the goodwill of the local community to progress a scheme which is now being watered down/amended. Clearing the parish needs more good quality affordable homes so this scheme is a positive response to that need – but do not take future support for granted. Be open with the community which I think you have been at this event – and continue to engage and be open as your progress.”

This is very well considered feedback, and recognises the challenges and compromises we have to make. To respond to various points:

- We believe we adequately considered the costs of infrastructure by appointing an experienced firm for quantity surveying and obtaining quotes for utility connections, however costs do fluctuate, and the scheme was costed in 2015. We've allowed for inflation, but costs aren't confirmed until a contractor provides a quote as part of their tender (which we undertook last year) - even then prices will have changed again by the time the work is undertaken. There is a lot of uncertainty and prediction (for which we use experienced consultants including our QS and financial consultant), and the reason this is particularly challenging for us is that there is no profit in the scheme to allow for unpredicted costs over and above our contingency.*
- What is to stop us coming back again? SHDC planning expect us to justify why changes are needed, and will look at our finances and viability assessment. We can only justify what is needed to be viable.*
- Setting a precedent/the green gap. We also want to maintain the green gap (and have trustees living on either side of it!), and part of our justification to the parish council and neighbourhood plan was that developing our site could prevent the adjacent fields from being developed (as SHDC won't allow access from the fields to the south onto Longcause for safety; and an access into the z-shaped field to the east wouldn't be permitted so close to our site access, again for safety reasons). We would not permit another developer access through Clay Park in order to develop these fields. None of these fields is allocated in the Local Plan, and ours was only permitted because of the high proportion of affordable housing, which wouldn't be of interest to conventional developers, and they would be unlikely to be successful in getting planning without this. We were up against a big developer in bidding for Clay Park. Dartington is under pressure from development and the A385 from increasing traffic – we are aware of this and sensitive to it, and believe the justification for Clay Park is the provision of affordable housing which is much needed.*

Proposed options: We considered (1) and we would have to swap so many affordable units to market that we would hardly be delivering any affordable housing. The affordable housing attracts grant which wouldn't be available to us. The shared ownership housing is actually as beneficial to us as the market housing due to grant funding, it's the affordable rental that creates a funding shortfall, and this is the most needed tenure. We chose to protect the number of affordable units and have more market housing, rather than switch existing affordable housing to market – that way, we still get 23 affordable homes.

(2) to clarify, we aren't building passive houses, but we have equivalent levels of insulation. Net zero is a higher target than passivhaus. To be truly zero carbon you must account for the embodied energy of the building materials, as well as energy use in the lifetime of the housing. Net zero buildings must generate as much energy as they use, while passive house isn't necessarily net zero (but can be) and sets stringent targets regarding energy use. We were attempting to do this through the use of straw bale, lime and timber (straw and timber being carbon stores) and generating our own electricity on site. Clay Park won't be net zero, but will have a dramatically lower carbon footprint than most volume housing. If an additional 8 houses generates more than enough money to

cover the deficit, this could be used to add back in elements such as the community building, or environmental aspects.

We are dependent on the goodwill of the community and appreciate the support we've had to date – we wouldn't have achieved so much without it. We're happy to be transparent about our plans and to discuss any questions or concerns people have by email, phone or face to face. All consultation materials will be available on our website. We have a mailing list which people can sign up to for updates (link on our website). More open meetings may soon follow.

“Admiration for the Transition Homes scheme – still on board, pushing the vision forward and willing to make compromises to enable the project to go ahead despite rising costs. Like communal aspects – shared growing spaces and open spaces encouraging interaction between residents. High sustainability codes. Building for people, not for profit.”

Community building feedback:

“It is important for community cohesion and for me to meet people, as a retired person.”

“Airbnb the guest room to generate income.” *An interesting idea which could be implemented when resident's visitors aren't using the space.*

“Losing the community building feels like gutting the scheme, but I understand the constraints. Opening the building up to others beyond residents would provide extra income, but also risks – vandalism, damage (I'm thinking of the bird hide on Dartington lower Drive) so would need monitoring. I think the core CLT members are awesome – thank you for sticking with it.”

Good point regarding security if there are more people accessing the scheme. We've considered a key code access to the building (which could be changed frequently) to restrict access to residents and users who have booked the space. There is a public footpath through the site regardless, so there will always be public access to Clay Park.

“I think the community building is a wonderful idea and a major part of what attracts me to this project (having spent a year working on a kibbutz, which is my ideal). It could be used for workshops (which can help raise money) as well as help nurture connection within the community. On kibbutz, there was a shared space with TV/PC, sofas, where people would hang out at night instead of being alone in their own spaces. How about a small quiet/meditation /therapy room as part of it? Brilliant project – that you for all your hard work and perseverance.”

We imagine the function room will be used as a shared space by residents, to watch movies, play games, share meals etc. A second room as a smaller, quiet or breakout space is also desirable, if we can afford it.

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Thanks for all the feedback. If you have any further queries which aren't answered by the materials on the website, please contact us on info@transitionhomes.org.uk