



# Dartmouth and Kingswear Society

Conserving, Enhancing, Informing, Enjoying

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Dartmouth & Kingswear Society**

#### **Local concern over latest Dartmouth plans**

The views of the Dartmouth & Kingswear Society on the West Dartmouth Development have evolved over the consultation period, but on one point they have remained unchanged: there should not be a third, isolated Dartmouth community. The most recent Masterplan put forward by Millwood Homes with instruction from South Hams District Council ensures that this is exactly what will be created.

At the recent Steering Group Meeting, a new fact emerged: there is a covenant attached to the land on which the Park & Ride and adjacent playing fields sit. The covenant was put in place by the MoD in the original sale of the land to a private individual, who sold it on to SHDC. The covenant continues to apply, but its existence was only disclosed in April to the developers. They said that the exact terms of the covenant had not been disclosed to them, but that as a consequence, SHDC, the Development's Planning Authority, required the Park & Ride and the playing field to remain unchanged.

It was always going to be difficult to make the new community 'joined-up' with Townstal, let alone the lower town, because Milton Farm owners declined to sell their land for use by the developers. However, as a consequence of the stance now being taken by SHDC, the optional open space at the centre of the development has been significantly increased, enlarging the separation zone from Townstal, creating an isolated, third Dartmouth community.

It is now clear that SHDC has a conflict of interest between its role as the Planning Authority with responsibility for shaping the development in the interests of the community, and its role as a land owner with possible liability arising from this covenant. For whatever reason, it has been slow to disclose the fact of the covenant's existence. Indeed, its terms have still not been disclosed, though it may be assumed that they relate to who gets the proceeds, if the land is sold for development.

SHDC has insisted that Millwood Homes shows Milton Farm and land adjacent to Kozi Corner as developable in the future. In previous Masterplans, Millwood Homes have considered them 'undevelopable'. It looks as if SHDC wants to imply that the WDD could be more fully integrated with Townstal after 2026. This, in the Society's view, is "kicking the can down the road". If an integrated community is worth having, it is worth having from the beginning.

The Society calls on SHDC to explain how the terms of the covenant have affected its decision to exclude the Park & Ride and the playing fields as potential sites for building the community hub and / or housing.

With regard to other aspects of the new Masterplan, the Society accepts the need for some flexibility over the boundaries set out in the Local Development Framework, so that housing can be built at an acceptable density (maximum 30 houses per hectare inclusive of roads and landscaping). However, the Society does not accept the substantial disregard of those boundaries for which the developer argued in its Land Capacity Report and which are now preserved in the new Masterplan because there is no possibility of building nearer to Townstal. The extensive development along the western edges of the site will create a type of urban sprawl along the A3122. Because it is a hill-top site, there will be a negative visual impact from all directions, despite retaining hedging along the road where possible. Moreover, a southward drift beyond the approved boundary would impinge visually on the designated South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Society strongly supports the provision of playing fields and play areas as essential elements of the development, but has argued that they can be located elsewhere, and that building houses on the land adjacent to Townstal should take priority in the interests of a 'joined-up' community. (There are alternative, suitable sites available for sports facilities, in particular the Jawbones Beacon Park, total 3.3 hectares, which is owned by SHDC.)

The Society recognises that decisions about the availability of affordable housing, let alone of social housing, are not the responsibility of Millwood Homes. South Hams District Council, influenced by Dartmouth Town Council and Stoke Fleming Parish Council, must use its powers to shape the WDD so that it helps meet the incontrovertible need for both.

Attracting new employment opportunities to the area is, again, not part of the developer's responsibilities, which are limited to providing serviced land for business premises. It makes good sense in the new Masterplan to include the 'hub' in the designated employment land, and locate the rest on the edge of the development with easy access from the A3122. South Hams District Council must now take a lead, with the active involvement of Dartmouth Town Council and Stoke Fleming Parish Council, so that the current good work of the Dartmouth Business Forum is built upon and expanded.

The Society remains convinced that a 'hub' at the Townstal / West Dartmouth interface, providing additional, job-sustaining services to those already situated in that general area, coupled with new housing, fully contiguous with the existing neighbourhood, remains the best way to integrate the two communities. The issue of whether and where medical services should be located in the new development (mentioned repeatedly in connection with the 'hub') is outside the remit of the Society, though it is a matter which its members clearly feel to be important. The Society urges the appropriate authorities to bring forward proposals at an early stage.

While supporting the Wasp Tower Project, which seeks to utilise the old heliport control tower as a landmark entrance point to the town, the Society is unpersuaded that substantial sums should be spent on creating a 'hard gateway' to Dartmouth. The approach (from whichever direction) is from rural Devon and should not provide a shock announcement. There should be a gradual transition from rural to urban, so that Dartmouth remains integrated with its surroundings. Provision of a new roundabout at the entrance to Sainsbury's with quick access to the 'hub' on the other side of the road, as now planned, is an adequate 'urban gateway'.

The Society strongly contends that Dartmouth must not settle for a bog standard housing estate, but demand the highest standards of building design and layout for the new development. It was regrettable that discussion of layout was compressed and discussion of building design squeezed out of the Steering Group meeting because of time spent discussing the newly announced covenant. Millwood Homes have generously arranged meetings so that views on building design can be shared.

The Society wishes to stay within its constitutional remit, which includes “the architecture and form of the built environment and the natural beauty of the district together with the maintenance of a viable local economy” and believes it does so by making these points. It is essential that the WDD should not go off at half-cock or worse, end up half finished – a white elephant - but be a tremendous asset to the town for the next 50 years and beyond.