

## ***Truro Civic Society***

### ***Chairman's Report July 2011***

The major issues on Truro's plate are the Truro Eastern District Centre and the massive development proposals at Threemilestone. The Mayor, our President, has been stalwart since the Mayor Making in his determination to ensure that development is both proportionate and reflects the aspirations and judgements of the communities of Truro and Kenwyn Parish. To this end he has led an initiative to apply to the Government for funding to undertake production of a Neighbourhood Plan for Truro and Kenwyn. As we heard from Roger Shuttlewood at our last meeting, Neighbourhood Plans are a facility forming part of the Localism Bill. The money being applied for is to pilot the approach.

The most important part of the Neighbourhood Plan project is that, having been put together on the basis of consultation, data development and a judicious process, it will be tested in a community referendum (which is what the Government money is for!). This should give it the force of full planning policy, by which planning decisions will be made, and against which Appeals will be tested.

For me, the drawback is that the Neighbourhood Plan has to be the means of implementing the Core Strategy. Because Truro is under intense pressure (from Cornwall Council as property owner and project partner in the Stadium as much as anything) without any robust planning policy to defend itself, it is urgent to get a Neighbourhood Plan in place. However, the Cornwall Core Strategy is unlikely to be approved for some time – perhaps as much as two or even three years – as it is a complex piece of work requiring significant consultative input to make it robust. Therefore, Truro's Neighbourhood Plan will have no firm reference, simply the emerging Core Strategy, against which to set itself.

There then arises the concern that, as at present cast, the Core Strategy is not reflecting to aspirations or judgements of the community, but is rather becoming the product of the pseudo-science of trend-based projections, household formation data and the crude formula of 35% 'affordable' housing – this has the effect of trebling the number of houses that are built in order to produce sufficient to meet Cornwall's actual need – a very market-driven policy that fails to consider the levels of population growth that Cornwall, unlike many other parts of the Country, has attracted over the past fifty years.

A further issue which should be affecting formation of the assumptions and outcomes of the Core Strategy is that, as a thirty year plan, it should be projecting what the demands of climate change management will be upon Cornwall, and making recommendations to the Secretary of State based on that, as well as upon finding ways of meeting housing need. In this regard, I have been advancing the argument in the press, in the Council, with Cornwall Agri-Food Council and with the Government that Cornwall has the second largest area of good quality pasture in the UK, a strong community of smallholding farmers who are the best in Britain, excellent transfer of produce to processors, and the new, world-class Environmental and Sustainability Institute at Tremough which is engaging with Cornish agriculture as part of its early research and knowledge-transfer programme.

Desertification in the South (North Africa and Mediterranean) may engender significant population drift North unless we can supply food. The UK will be at the heart of the temperate zone agricultural effort, and Cornwall, as the future 'moistest region in the UK' (Met Office 2010) will be a leading producer of energy, food and fuel. In that context, and bearing in mind that the Council's planners are now considering sites around Truro which could, if all came to fruition over the next thirty years, remove from production at least twenty farms and significant areas of our best land, we clearly have a conflict of objectives, and a judgement needs to be reached. This judgement needs to be made by the government, as it sets down planning policy guidance. The choice is clear – consume land by building and over-supply of housing (plus infrastructure etc), or conserve land and resolve the housing problem by re-using property (2<sup>nd</sup> homes, holiday lets, business premises) and by using only genuine 'brown' land.

I believe that it is for Cornwall Council, as the largest rural local authority in the UK, to take the lead and to challenge the Government, work with the ESI to substantiate our case, to issue an invitation to other rural areas similarly affected to join us, and to persuade the Government that, if we are to be serious about climate change, we cannot reduce our farming resource any further. I find that my campaign is finding people of like mind and that it is beginning to generate serious debate. If we are successful and can change the objectives and principles of the Core Strategy, then we will be forming a Neighbourhood Plan within framework which will chime with the aspirations and concerns of the community and it will be successful.

The alternative course is for us to form a Neighbourhood Plan within the current Core Strategy framework and risk losing the referendum. This would have a very negative effect and leave the planning system in even worse shape than it is now, and Truro even more vulnerable.

#### ***TEDC***

The planning application is submitted. Objections are being submitted. There is increasing concern about the impacts, including concern expressed by the Head of Transport Development, Nigel Blackler, that consultation should seek views on

the whole scheme and not just the land development. Although the highways proposals are contained within the substantial documentation for the application, the highways proposals have not been adequately publicised.

The whole scheme is very complex and invites a critique on a range of issues, from drainage and sewage to highways, business planning, sequential testing, the siting of recycling facilities and so on. I am working on a response from the Society which I have tabled. It is not yet complete.

### ***Threemilestone***

A consultation is now under way in Kenwyn regarding infrastructure proposals for the major development proposals. This does not link to the Draft Interim Plan, or to anything else and is causing concern. The current applications for a stadium, which does not appear to have assembled a viable funding package, include 1700 houses – the stadium now includes a substantial office and conference facility which may render a stadium viable, but will have a significant impact upon the vitality of Truro Town Centre.

A second proposal for which an application is imminent is for a supermarket and a further tranche of housing, bringing the total number of houses proposed to about 3000 – which is double the figure proposed by the Structure Plan.

At the same time, the Government requires that the Council is able to identify a five year land supply, although it is increasingly unclear what scale of supply is required because the number of houses now on the table far outweighs the numbers required under the Structure Plan, which is the only legitimate, on-deposit strategic plan (even though it is over 10 years old!

But never mind, because if we don't get the Core Strategy reconfigured, it is likely to be calling for 6-8000 houses. Which explains why the Interim Draft Strategic Planning Framework for Truro and surrounding parishes is suggesting considering a vast acreage of land all around the Truro/Threemilestone envelope for development at some time over the next 30 years – a proposition which, if published (which I am trying to prevent at the moment) will unleash an options bidding war. This in turn will stretch the banks that will, ultimately demand that something is done to trigger repayments – and so the whole thing becomes less of a consultation and more of a self-fulfilling prophecy based on what the Cold War planners used to describe as 'Mutually Assured Destruction' – both developers and towns will simply consume themselves in their efforts to feed voracious master, banks and governments!

Excuse me for this outburst, but I find it all exasperating beyond the point of really seeing what we can do about it, even though it is all so patently wrong, destructive and ill-founded.

Meanwhile, I continue to demand on a monthly basis that Mr England secures the development of cottages at 15/16 St Clements' Street, that action is taken to replace the Glass House in Kenwyn Street and so on.

### ***The Drummer***

The Society supported the Reception held prior to the unveiling of The Drummer. The Press seem to be whipping up a sceptical response from the public even though many people like the piece, many are making up their minds and many simply ask what it has to do with Truro or Cornwall. Few actually say they dislike it – whatever, it is proving to be a strong talking point, has been well-publicised and is bringing people in to Truro – I think TCS can be proud of its involvement in the scheme to provide a sculpture for Lemon Quay. The unveiling event was certainly dramatic and well attended.

### ***Jenny Gale***

The Conservation Officer has announced that she is take redundancy and will be leaving at the beginning of September. Jenny has made a strong impact upon those engaged in the Conservation Area – not everybody has agreed with everything she has done, or prevented, but she has struggled with a mountainous workload, and with diminishing influence as the current planning 'regime' has come into force. We should extend our thanks to her for her stint, and recognise that she has contributed much to our town over the past few years.

The trip with the Falmouth TCS was successful. I'm sorry not to have been able to go. The exploration of the Mansion House and Prince's House will be interesting. I must thank both Caroline, for all her diligent and thorough organisation (and tactful reminders) and Edwina for her strong and cheerful support, both as Minute Secretary and in joining in with visits to Truro City Council and elsewhere, and in being more than patient with your over-extended Chairman.

Lastly, I'm very glad to be receiving e-mails again from the Vice Chairman who tells me he is mending. I greatly value John's support and wise counsel, and his tenacity and still passionate defence of Truro, the principles of good design and cordiality in the conduct of business. I look forward to seeing him here 'ere long.

BB

July 2011.