

## **Minutes of SOCIT Public Meeting** **Fielden Centre, Todmorden – 17.4.17**

The Steering Committee introduced themselves to the meeting:  
Barbara Jones (School of Natural Building) Nick Green (Manager - Edible Farm) Dr Robin Asby (Secretary of Edible Farm), Emma Leeming (Massage Therapist),  
apologies from Jane Wolfendale (Luna Luna)

Recap – Barbara Jones explained the rationale for this meeting – to inform the group of developments since the first Public Meeting.

There is now a strategic vision within the (Save Our College in Todmorden (SOCIT) campaign to create TLC Todmorden Learning Centre.

It cannot be called a College as these are regulated legal entities requiring unfeasible levels of compliance and scrutiny.

Janet Battye asked for SOCIT to offer clarification as to its use of TLC as this is the name is used by a local bus company. The name in full would be Todmorden Learning Centre and Community Hub.

Barbara summarised the history of this campaign, commencing when it was heard that Calderdale Council offered to sell Todmorden College to Aldi, who would demolish the building and thus enable them to build a larger supermarket than the one already planned on the adjoining site (formerly the Abraham Ormerod Centre and cinema buildings).

Aldi may be wishing to utilise a bigger premises so as to challenge competition for the proposed new and enlarged Lidl store.

The School of Natural Building (SNaB) has been a virtual school as it has no premises. TLC could provide an ideal base for the expanding and cutting edge company.

An area of the ground floor of the college, largely that occupied by art studios, has been earmarked by the School of Natural Building as suitable.

Alongside Edible Farm, SNaB would be anchor tenants in TLC.

SNaB has recently secured a share of a 6.3 million Euro grant. It hoped to spend much of their share in Todmorden and offered Calderdale Council to rebuild Todmorden High School but this was declined. Of the 6.3million euro grant, 1.2 million euros are invested in the UK, the majority in Hastings where SNaB is currently undertaking a large building project.

SNaB plans to increase the number of students significantly. They are currently limited in taking on new building work due to insufficient skilled workers able to deliver projects, it therefore currently doesn't advertise.

Increased training is anticipated to enable expansion of this internationally renowned business.

Incredible Farm have plans to develop its education role, again using TLC as its base. It has devised learning plans, and the agro-ecology utilised by Incredible Farm is also cutting edge.

There is a vision of TLC becoming a Community Hub.

There is significant testimony of the educational role and impact on lives from many former Todmorden College Students.

It is hoped that this impact can be sustained and enhanced by the proposed TLC, with art classes, summer schools and gym facilities as examples of what may be available.

Upper Calder Valley Renaissance (UCVR) was commissioned by Calderdale Council and Todmorden Council to produce a pre-feasibility report.

Community consultation indicated a strong desire to retain the college in some form.

SOCIT was set up with an email address and Facebook page, and 100 people attended the first Public Meeting.

UCVR applied for Todmorden College to be considered as an asset of community value. That nomination was successful on 23<sup>rd</sup> March

The implication of this is that if Calderdale Council wish to dispose of Todmorden College, any group would have 6 weeks to put forward a bid and then 6 months to put together a proposal (including the initial 6 weeks) The TLC would be a not for profit community organisation.

UCVR will be notified when the council takes the final decision to dispose (26<sup>th</sup> April Council Meeting)

There is a need for careful research as to additional businesses, besides the anchor tenants, who would wish to rent space at the proposed TLC, revenue forecasts, the income needed to meet running costs.

Janet Battye asked for anyone available to attend the Development Board Meeting scheduled for the following day (Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March, 5-7pm).

It was clarified that Aldi do not currently have planning permission for the larger site they would gain through purchase and demolition of Todmorden College.

They will undoubtedly be preparing plans with a view to gaining planning permission. This will be during the period when the TLC business plan is being written, and a campaign will be needed to resist their case for planning permission.

There are strong grounds for this, including logistical issues around access and also disturbance to residents premises.

An attendee raised the issue that the new, well designed Jubilee Children's Centre in Halifax, which utilises permaculture, is fantastic. This was designed by Straw Works and built in collaboration with the training side of SW, which has now become SNaB.

We are unclear as to the quality of Aldi's proposed plans for a children's centre. Janet Battye shared her belief that the proposal is limited in design quality and space, the design looking more like a day nursery. The plans do suggest that the proposed children's centre and youth centre would be close to the main road, and lorries entering and exiting the site would have an impact.

This is potentially a key issue as Calderdale Council's press releases have highlighted that Aldi's proposed use of the site would provide new, up to date children's centre and youth service, and that these are key areas they wish to provide.

They are using the idea that Aldi will provide new premises for these as a key argument for the sale of the site to Aldi.

It will therefore be important to find out the nature and quality of Aldi's design proposals. Any limitations to their proposals should be highlighted by this campaign.

There were questions from the floor as to how far TLC could enhance facilities of the existing children's centre and youth services. Barbara explained that initially finances would restrict this, but in the long term there could be an opportunity for SNaB to build an entirely new children's centre and youth service. The advantage of this would be that the Children's services would not have to spend 18 months in portacabins.

The TLC aims to keep existing services including Citizen's Advice Centre and Healthy Minds.

The running costs of the children's centre and youth centre will be £75,000 p.a.. The council will still be paying this. This will be a saving of £15,000 p.a as current running costs of the College are about £90,000.

Todmorden College has been valued at £300,000 by an external valuer. However Aldi offered £750,000. We have investigated this and it is apparently not classed as a bribe. This seems suspicious to some! Aldi will own the land but not the building of their proposed new children's centre and youth service. Aldi will build the new building but Calderdale will pay for it, and Calderdale will pay Aldi a peppercorn rent for the land.

The cost to the council is thought to be £1.2 million plus £75,000 p.a.

There is a good gym in the college, yet this cannot be used as equipment lacks health and safety certificates (which cost money to renew).

The TLC proposal would reinstate these certificates to re-open the gym. Todmorden Harriers, and the netball team have been mooted as some of the many users who would benefit.

There is a big hall with stage, which is currently half used by the youth service and half used as office space (though usage is not continual).

We need to find new potential users of this space.

SNaB would like a vocational teaching area to help enlarge their team and enable them to be skilled in several areas of construction, eg joinery, plumbing and electrics as well as natural building. Multi-skilled builders are necessary in natural building.

Training in lime plastering is likely to be useful in supporting growth in the heritage building sector.

Incredible Farm wish to run agro-ecology classes, potentially collaborating with a local University, and this could bring prestigious groups into Todmorden. SNaB already has such links.

Part of the TLC vision is for Todmorden to be a northern satellite training and education centre linked to Universities and Colleges.

Nick Green has a plan to develop an Edible Learning Centre, with internal climbing plants benefiting from the many south facing windows and heating outputs.

There is a need to offer training for local businesses in marketing and business finance.

SNaB wishes to expand its management courses using the TLC base. All groups would be welcome to use TLC, from brass band, cookery, ESOL courses.

Nick Green pointed out that many such ventures might gain grants which would be an income enabling rental of rooms at TLC.

There is already a well equipped cookery room in the college which also needs health and safety inspections/certificates.

Space could be used for residential accommodation for students on courses (SNaB courses draw students from a wide area).

There was a question as to whether EU withdrawal would impact on the funding gained by the SNaB collaboration. It is hoped that our PM may be able to negotiate as part of the withdrawal process, the continued provision of funding for such training.

One idea is for pop-up cafes and cooking classes, especially using locally grown produce such as that grown at Incredible Farm.

Leeds College of Building have expressed an interest in using TLC. Carpentry courses could easily be sited in TLC.

The broad Council position is that Todmorden College is a drain on resources.

We need to let the council and town know that we want and are prepared to develop a viable learning centre.

Penny Marrington suggested as many people as possible should attend Council Meetings. It is felt that Todmorden Development Board has changed its behaviour since it allowed the public to attend. It will be important to clarify with the existing children's centre and youth service as to whether Aldi's plans actually meet their needs. Both services are thought to value a new building. Both services do not want a porta cabin interim. For the children's centre, daylight and outdoor space are important. SOCIT will benefit from Richard Needham's input (has designed children's centres)

A two-pronged challenge to the Council may be useful:

- a) The Aldi proposal does not offer a good space and design for children's centre
- b) We may be able to offer some enhancements
- c) Eventually new buildings for both services could be developed through SNaB.

We need clarity and information in the TLC business plan.

A cafe/restaurant could be a good source of ongoing income. The Whittaker in Rawtenstall is a model example. If offering evening opening, there would not necessarily be competition with local businesses. This may be more useful as a consistent source of income, as this cannot be sustained with a pop-up style business model.

The meeting was then opened up into focus group discussions including:

- a) Constitution and values of TLC.
- b) Friends of Todmorden Learning group – this might be comparable to Hebden Bridge Town Hall, and should encourage mass membership.
- c) Attendees who share similar interests to discuss what they could offer, what they would need and possible ways forward.