

A Vision for the Future of Todmorden

Todmorden is a post-industrial Pennine market town with a population of 15,000, situated 25 miles north east of Manchester; it was a centre of innovation in the industrial revolution. Despite the decline over the last century it has retained its innovative spirit. Eight years ago a group of Todmorden people got together to found Incredible Edible Todmorden with the aim of galvanising the whole community around the food agenda. This initiative developed three social enterprises Incredible Farm, the Aquagarden, and the town centre community group, Incredible Edible Todmorden. As a result the town has become the focus of the Worldwide Incredible Edible movement. In parallel to this a pioneering natural building company founded in Todmorden has become Straw Works Ltd whose reputation and buildings are now Europe Wide. On this dual foundation we are setting out to build a future for Todmorden and its people.

Towards the end of 2016 it became apparent that Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council (CMBC) was planning to sell the building that was Todmorden Community College to the Aldi Supermarket Company to be bulldozed to make way for a carpark for a large supermarket in the centre of the town. The education that has been based there has been centralised to Halifax and the college run down, much to the detriment of the town. The sale process is now paused by the actions of the people of Todmorden. The building has been registered as an “asset of community value” and we are working on a detailed business plan. CMBC will decide in November whether to give the property to Todmorden Learning Centre (a new CBS company) or Aldi.

Our Vision is three fold: to create a National Learning Centre in the Calder Valley that will provide real and marketable skills in natural building, agro-ecology and micro-generation. It will also be a Community Hub, nurture our local community, have space to be creative, artistic, innovative and energetic, and house some of our much needed local services – a Children’s Centre and a Youth club. And it will support and house business start ups, small businesses and co-working spaces offering superfast fibre optic broadband.

As a result of interest from the Northern 8 Group of Universities, we believe this initiative will not only benefit the town, but also could be the start of a northern initiative to create a centre of innovation in living sustainably with Todmorden at the centre of it all.

We aim

- ☑ To offer practical training courses in natural building to equip local people and others from wider afield to learn skills so as to self-build their own houses with low carbon materials, flood resilient foundations, find useful employment, set up their own businesses and maintain their own properties.
- ☑ To offer courses in small scale sustainable food production including flood mitigation farming, integration of wildlife habitat and human food production, soil carbon building methods and high welfare dairy farming.
- ☑ To develop Micro Electricity Generation
- ☑ To create a National Centre to host other organisations offering similar courses and events.
- ☑ To create a Community Hub where local people, organisations and businesses can run courses, evening classes, artist schools, and meet and work/learn/socialise together.
- ☑ To retain the Children and Youth services at the centre of Todmorden.

To offer office spaces of varying sizes to small businesses, business start ups and co working spaces with super fast fibre optic broadband.

To return the community hall and gym to its former glory and add in a community cafe

Background

The vision was initiated by two local not-for-profit social enterprises, the School of Natural Building (SNaB), based in Todmorden for 20 years, and led by local entrepreneur Barbara Jones, and Incredible Farm (IF), now 7 years old, based in Walsden and Lumbutts and led by Nick Green and socially concerned individuals, Emma Leeming a local massage therapist and Dr Robin Asby, a retired lecturer in Business and Management.

Following a very successful public meeting on the 8th February attended by over 100 people we have set up a non-political steering group of community members to create a business plan to utilise the Todmorden College building as the learning centre we wish to see in our vision. Under the Assets of Community Value (England) Regulations 2012 we have until November 9th to produce a business plan for the college.

The Todmorden Learning Centre (TLC) will attract users from our local area of Todmorden and the Calder Valley, but the courses we will have on offer in e.g agroecology, sustainable building, and micro generation will have a much wider appeal and participants will come from all over the UK and other European countries. We have received many letters of support for our venture, and expressions of interest that will turn into definite events and courses run by others and hosted by us.

The Community Hub is predominantly for local people and those from the Calder Valley, but some local artists, for instance, will be offering summer schools to an audience drawn from all over the UK. Local Service Provision will continue to be housed by the TLC, providing support for families with children via the Children's Centre, and for young people via the Youth Club.

One of our founding partners, the School of Natural Building (SNaB) has proven itself to be very successful without any funding or a physical base, having at present 44 students studying at various stages of the curriculum. It has done no marketing so far because they do not want to create more demand than can be managed, but with premises, it will be possible to expand the range of courses and especially to offer the 'Build a Mini-building in 5 days' course that has been successful previously. SnaB has been successful in the past in securing grant funding for Erasmus training, and a Leonardo partnership. It has strong links and networks and will be expanding to work collaboratively with natural building training centres in other parts of the world. Recently **SNaB** has been jointly awarded 6.3m euros to increase the uses of low carbon technologies in sectors with high energy saving potential. By working with UK partners Hastings Borough Council & Groundwork South as well as European partners in France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, SNaB will help to reduce GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions across North West Europe

The Incredible farm was established in 2010, it is now in the process of moving to a 15 acre hill top site. There are several enterprises within the farm: fruit tree nursery, salad and vegetable production and teaching. The farm uses grant funding for infrastructure improvements and business developments and is currently approximately two thirds self- financing. The salad

production from two poly-tunnels has achieved consistent annual sales of £6000, and since the costs are very low, if scaled up a turnover of £200,000/Hectare could be achieved, well above any form of conventional farming. The new farm allows expansion space to turn the developing micro dairy herd into a profitable business, alongside tourism and events.

The Farm has a world-wide reach and recruits volunteers from all over the world and all year round. Courses in agro-ecology are under development and we are confident that these could translate into substantial income from courses.