

John Birch
SHDC Member for Totnes
Report to the meeting to be held on
Monday 5 January 2026

I report on the following.

A NEW PROPOSAL FOR THE FORMER DAIRY CREST SITE

It's an often asked question in the town – "What is happening to the old Dairy Crest site?" Is 2026 the year the site's owners, Fastglobe, will make things happen?

Prior to closure in 2007 the site was used as a milk processing/creamery plant under Dairy Crest. Since closure it has lain derelict. The industrial buildings have fallen into disrepair and the site is in a sorry state.

Soon after closure local residents proposed a community-led redevelopment project. The plan, known as Atmos, envisaged affordable housing (including retirement housing), workspaces, community facilities and reuse of the Brunel building as an arts centre.

The development design process involved wide local engagement and over 4,000 people contributed ideas. In 2016, a referendum was held: 86% of voters backed the Atmos plan.

However despite this community support the Atmos plan did not materialise for, in 2021 the site was sold by the then-owner (the successor to Dairy Crest) to the current owners of the site, Fastglobe. The sale brought an end to the Atmos project and resulted in widespread protest across the town.

Fastglobe made two planning applications that were turned down by South Hams District Council as being unacceptable on planning grounds. It appealed and in the proceedings the inspector granted permission but with numerous conditions that could have made the scheme unviable.

Fastglobe has come forward with a new scheme and has submitted a planning application. Once registered the planning documents will be published on the South Hams District Council's website and will be available for public inspection and comment.

So what is this new scheme? From the documents I have seen it is a mixed-use development with 125 homes within three residential blocks with a mixture of mainly one and two bedroom apartments. Fastglobe will need to assure the planners that there are sufficient affordable homes within the proposed development.

The proposed scheme includes a 45 bedroom boutique hotel and nine commercial shop units. The chimney will remain as a feature of the site.

At the heart of the proposal is the restoration of the historic Brunel building, which Fastglobe assures will be sensitively restored and which will provide an exhibition space with a bar and restaurant.

Fastglobe says that in partnership with the Environment Agency, the scheme will deliver major flood resilience improvements by reducing downstream flood risk

Campaign to tackle damp and mould in rented homes

SHDC has launched a campaign to help residents and landlords tackle damp and mould, so tenants can live in safe, warm and healthy homes.

The campaign comes in response to national concern about the health risks caused by poor housing conditions. Following the tragic death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak in his home in Rochdale in 2020, the Government issued clear guidance outlining the responsibilities of landlords and tenants, alongside new laws for social housing providers which were introduced last October.

Building on this, SHDC's campaign aims to prevent similar tragedies locally by supporting both tenants and landlords to take early action against damp and mould. The campaign encourages landlords and tenants to work together to identify and resolve problems quickly.

Tenants can now report unresolved damp or mould issues easily using a new online form, while landlords can access clear information about their legal duties and best practice.

To help residents and property owners take action, SHDC has created a dedicated section on its website offering practical guidance, including:

- How to identify and treat damp and mould
- Simple tips to stop problems getting worse
- Legal guidance for landlords on their responsibilities

Further advice will be shared throughout the winter months, when cold and wet weather can make damp and mould more common.

The campaign forms part of the Council's wider commitment to improving housing standards and supporting community wellbeing across the district.

Residents can also access support and help from Citizens Advice South Hams and local community energy groups, who can help with practical steps such as reducing condensation and improving energy efficiency.

For more information, to access advice, or to report unresolved damp and mould issues, visit www.southhams.gov.uk/dampandmould

SHDC investing in public toilets across Totnes

South Hams District Council is improving public toilets in Totnes – as part of its wider commitment to invest in its communities.

From 12 January, the council will start works on the toilets in Steamer Quay Car Park, for around four weeks.

The toilets under the Civic Hall will have their own refurbishment works between 19 January and 31 March.

The refurbishment works at Steamer Quay will involve a partial closure, where the accessible toilets will remain open while works are carried out. The Civic Hall toilets will be closed completely during their refurbishment due to their size and location.

Motion following National Emergency Briefing on Climate Change

At the last SHDC Full Council Cllrs McKay and I proposed the following.

Many Members will be aware of the National Emergency Briefing (<https://nebriefing.org>) on Climate Change held in Westminster on 27th November 2025. It was organised and largely funded by Simon and Nick Oldridge who are based locally and Simon was a founding member of Sustainable South Hams. The event was attended by an invited audience of about 1,250 people, which included many MPs including our local South Devon MP and this Council's Climate Officer.

The messages were clear. Climate change is accelerating. CO₂ in the atmosphere now exceeds 426 ppm and the rate of increase is worsening, not leveling off or dropping. Current projections put us on track for 2°C warming by 2050 and a real risk of 3-4°C by 2100.

This will be absolutely catastrophic. It will affect young people that are just starting their lives... they are facing a very difficult future.

Just one example of the many challenges is the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation that is already weakening and it may collapse. Given current global warming trends, the latest estimated likelihood of this happening before the end of the century is between 50 and 70%. The consequences for the UK and Europe would be winters of -20C and blistering hot dry summers, affecting local and global food supplies, health ... and social stability.

Nature's systems of regulating CO₂ are faltering. The carbon cycle that existed and nurtured the emergence of humanity is breaking down.

So, to quote Al Gore, "we need to stop using the sky as an open sewer"

Nature in the UK and beyond is collapsing, driven not only by climate-change but pollution, habitat loss and intensive farming. The 2023 Landmark Report states that

16% of species are at risk of being lost, for birds its 43%, and amphibians and reptiles its 31%. Since 1970, 19% of all species have been lost.

It is an emergency, it is insidious and creeping in human timescales... but that does not make it any less of an emergency, and measured in geological timescales it is happening very very fast.

The dark enormity of what we face is hard to comprehend, and while there is much that is way beyond any Council to control, there is also a lot we can do and must do, and supporting the Climate National Emergency Briefing initiative is one such thing. We must add our voice to the rallying cry and refute the irresponsible and dangerous notion that the threat of climate change is exaggerated, or worse still, a hoax. It will leave people unprepared and vulnerable.

Motion

This Council **RESOLVES** that:

1. It supports the work and message of the National Emergency Briefing and calls on the government, politicians, businesses and organisations to heed its call for effective and urgent action.
2. It recognises and thanks Nick and Simon Oldridge for all the hard work they are putting into raising awareness of the real and imminent threats of climate change.
3. It will ask that all members of the UK100 network of Local Authorities consider passing similar motions that support the National Emergency Briefing initiative.
4. It reaffirms the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency it declared in 2020 and recognises that with the passage of 5 years the climate crisis has deepened and it is more important than ever to be guided by that declaration in everything the Council does.”

The motion was passed with overwhelming support.

2 January 2026

Cllr John Birch
SHDC Member for Totnes