



# Totnes Sustainable Construction Ltd

[www.totnessustainableconstruction.co.uk](http://www.totnessustainableconstruction.co.uk)

**REconomy Project**

## **Mission**

We are a not for profit building company specialising in new construction, refurbishment and retrofitting projects that incorporate sustainable methods with an emphasis on natural materials & well-insulated, energy-efficient buildings.

## **Is there a link with Transition?**

Yes, to Transition Town Totnes although we are a separate legal entity. All directors are actively involved in TTT.

## **Your product or service – how much does it help improve resilience in your local community or elsewhere?**

We emphasise natural materials. In fact, we want to create a model for using natural and sustainable materials, using local suppliers wherever possible. We also employ local staff. In the past, before fossil fuels made possible the cheap transport of building materials around the country, even around the world, then buildings were constructed with locally available materials. This also meant that every region had characteristic 'vernacular' building styles. We believe a return to local materials will save energy and lead to a renaissance in regional styles of building.

Several of the buildings we have refurbished have gone on to participate in the Open Eco-Homes Weekends organised by TTT so local people can learn about the techniques and materials we have used. TTT won a LEAF grant to refurbish the village hall in Dartington and TSC won the tender to do the work. It was a great example of collaboration between TTT, TSC and the Village Hall Committee and was followed by an open day where local people were shown before and after thermal images of the hall. Materials used included sheep's wool and wood fibre insulation, local timber as well as natural paints and timber treatments. Replacement window frames were made by a local joiner and around two local people were employed.

We also place great emphasis on energy efficiency. All new builds should be close to carbon neutral – today's new build should never become tomorrow's retrofit - and refurbishment should make this possible for many existing houses as well.

## **Employees**

This varies with the job – around 10 people have worked for us on a self-employed basis at various times. As we develop a consistent workflow we aim to take on permanent staff, apprentices and trainees.

## **Are you in profit? If not, when do you anticipate being so? How long have you been trading?**

We have been in operation for three years and our turnover was £127,000 in 2011 and 107,000 in 2012. We are not yet in profit but are currently negotiating a £280,000 contract that should make us profitable in the current financial year. TSC hopes to be the builder for Transition Homes – a £3.1m build.

## **What is your company structure and why did you choose it?**

Company limited by guarantee – not for profit. Some members had previous bad experience of working as part of a cooperative. We did not want any individual liability and we didn't want to seek community investment or have the hassle of being a charity – so this model worked for us.

**What about financial sustainability? Are you trading or part-trading without money?**

We only required very limited start up funds, which included some loans from individual directors which have largely been repaid. As we currently use self employed staff who work with their own tools we haven't needed to invest in expensive buildings, vehicles or equipment.

**Are you looking to build more common wealth & ownership and is priority your profit sharing and/or community benefits versus more traditional investor returns?**

Being a not-for-profit company doesn't mean that TSC can't make a surplus but this is re-invested into the company rather than shared among directors, although no director has yet received any payment for work performed as a director. We anticipate being able to make donations to TTT or other relevant groups when we have a more secure financial position. But using local employees and materials inevitably boosts the local economy and the 'common wealth'.

**Localisation – are you sourcing, distributing and interacting locally?**

As much as possible although some eco-building products are not manufactured in the UK. In Devon we have an abundance of local materials suitable for building – timber, stone, the raw materials to make lime, straw, sheep's wool insulation and, of course, soil with enough clay to make excellent cob. There is already a return to the use of cob by several local builders and individuals. We are also looking at rammed earth and hemp lime which are comparatively new techniques.

**Climate impacts – negative, beneficial or neutral?**

Climate change and rising energy prices are a driver for our business. However, the complexity of climate change – wet years followed by extremely hot ones, mild winters and then very cold ones – make it difficult to design buildings that will perform well in future climate scenarios.

