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## dawlish tomorrow: the vision

At the *Dawlish Tomorrow* event we introduced our 10-year vision for Dawlish town centre:

**A lively, stylish and prosperous Dawlish town centre is the commercial, social and cultural hub of the community, and a magnet for tourists and day visitors.**

**The Lawn**, the open space in the heart of the town, is famous throughout the region: a beautiful riverside garden; a quiet place for picnics, sitting out and walking, and for Carnival events like children's sports and the flower show. There is atmospheric lighting for the long summer evenings; in December the magical winter lights are switched on for the Dawlish Winter Festival which attracts visitors from all parts of the region. A popular café serving food from local producers commands a view down the Lawn; in front of the café there is an arena for musicians and street performers.

This stretch of *Dawlish Water* has been "naturalised": a gently sloping wetland margin has replaced the old canalised stream. A small eco-building perches on the south bank: a visitor and education centre dedicated to the natural history of Dawlish and its river, and showcasing the waterfowl breeding and conservation programme.

The Lawn is overlooked by *the Strand* – a stylish parade

of shops and restaurants. **The Strand** is well known for fine food, quality crafts, fashion and antiques; its Regency and Victorian buildings have been restored, and there is a new design code for facades and shop fronts. A core of respected High Street names act as retail anchors, including Marks & Spencer Simply Food. A wide pavement encourages shoppers to stroll and pause. A sweep of shallow steps leads down into the park to create the experience of shopping in a garden, and there are platforms for café seating and benches. The street is no longer clogged with traffic and parked cars: parking is restricted to the north side of the street, with priority for disabled drivers; deliveries are prohibited at peak times.

**The Shaftesbury** is the focus for cultural and community activity in Dawlish: the theatre has a full programme of local productions, contemporary dance, music, theatre and film. The Old Post Office houses the Community Trust and other cultural and community groups and there is a suite of meeting rooms. The former sorting office buildings have been converted into studios and workspace for the creative industries, ranged around a courtyard. The Dawlish Festival Society is based at the Shaftesbury: it has established a regular calendar of arts events, spanning film, performance, visual arts and – in the summer – street theatre, which have become a fixture in the cultural life of the region.

A smart new building stands at the bottom of Barton Hill, next to the river. **The Dawlish Incubator** provides serviced office space for a cluster of start-up and micro-businesses, and is part of a concerted drive to diversify the town's economy and create more high-wage, high-skill jobs. The Incubator is managed by the same team that is responsible for the Dawlish Knowledge Park at Shutterton. As part of this development, the scruffy car park at *Barton Hill* has had a facelift, and a new public space has been created around the museum.

The terraced cottages packed on the hillside north of the river are in demand. This has become a popular *quarter for artists, craft workers and young professionals*, attracted by the new vitality of Dawlish, its cultural life and its more youthful image. This new surge of popularity has benefited the community, but it has created pressure in the housing market: the Town Council has had to work hard to ensure that all new residential developments contain a substantial element of affordable housing for local people.

As we head towards the sea, the tranquillity of the Lawn gives way to a busier scene. **The market place** is used all the year round for markets and community events: demountable tented structures provide protection from the weather. A new pavilion houses the tourist information centre, a kiosk and public conveniences.



The old gyratory system has been scrapped, and two-way traffic has been restored on the A379, passing across the widened *Jubilee Bridge*. The new traffic management regime is designed to keep vehicles moving, but at an acceptable pace. There is a 20mph speed limit and pedestrians can now follow desire lines between the town centre, Piermont Square and the seafront.

By removing through traffic from Piermont Place and Station Road it has been possible to re-cast Tuck's Plot as a civic space at the threshold to the seafront. In contrast to the elegant Lawn, *Piermont Square* is busier, livelier and more family-orientated. There is play equipment, water features and dramatic seasonal lighting, and Station Road and Marine Parade are now the designated sites for summer and winter fairs. But this is not a return to kiss-me-quick hats and tacky arcades: like the rest of Dawlish in 2018, Piermont Place is smart, stylish and engaging.

The *historic station* has finally been restored and its café is a favourite place for walkers and cyclists – there is secure storage for bikes. Planned maintenance of the *sea wall* has enabled improvements to the foot tunnel: the river has been exposed and pedestrians walk above the water on a cobweb bridge suspended from the arch. The *seafront* has been treated with a light touch to preserve its unique atmosphere, but there is new lighting and seating and the

kiosk has been replaced with a simple new structure.

Dawlish has become *a hub for walkers and cyclists*. It is the most welcoming and attractive stopping-off point on the coastal route between Exeter and Torbay, and many people choose to head inland to explore the hidden valley of Dawlish Water and the Haldon Hills.

The driving force behind this transformation has been the *Dawlish Tomorrow Partnership*, set up by the Town Council and the Community Trust in 2008 to implement the town centre strategy and master plan. Under its dynamic manager, DTP plays a dual role:

- it has been the catalyst for the 10-year programme of regeneration and development, now almost complete: DTP has worked with public and private sector partners to raise funds for projects – including successful applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and has acted as the guardian of the community's interests
- it provides a town centre management service: working with local businesses and community groups to improve business performance and presentation, managing community assets on behalf of the Town Council, organising events and festivities and running promotional campaigns.