

**“**I’ve been here 10 years, and I love the place. It’s a really warm and friendly community



Jo Creese, 41, a teaching assistant, Bradley Stoke

**“**I’ve worked as a cook at St Mary’s School since it opened. It’s a nice modern area, with new facilities



Maxine Knight, 42, school cook, Bradley Stoke

**“**I’ve lived in Bradley Stoke for 20 years, and seen it grow. It now has a good sense of identity and community



Debbie Nicholls, 46, secretary, Bradley Stoke

**“**The new shopping centre has brought the area together and makes it feel like a proper place with its own identity



Kathy Burden, 43, teacher Bradley Stoke

# SADLY BROKE? NOT THIS THRIVING TOWN

As we launch a week of features celebrating life in Bradley Stoke, DAVID CLENSY looks at the history of the ‘new town’ in South Gloucestershire and examines how the area once derided as ‘Sadly Broke’ has finally found its feet



**Welcome in:** A sign welcomes drivers to the new town of Bradley Stoke, which after more than 20 years is now a thriving community in its own right

**A**S you drive around Bradley Stoke today, there are certain things you are bound to notice. It feels modern and planned, with its central arteries of dual carriageways, and countless cosy cul-de-sacs. At its core is the Willow Brook shopping mall, with the enormous new Tesco Extra store among its shops, and the neighbouring library and leisure centre making this once derided “new town” the envy of many suburban districts.

This is the vision of Bradley Stoke that planners might have imagined back in the 1980s when they first put pen to paper to create a new community on a swathe of South Gloucestershire countryside.

The name, chosen in 1994, derives from Bradley Brook and Stoke Brook, both of which flow nearby.

The first turf was cut in 1987 by the then MP for the area, John Cope, with a JCB instead of the traditional silver

spade. Since then some 9,000 houses and flats have been built, giving the district a population of about 20,000. But for the best part of a decade, the fairytale went sour.

The area had already experienced the problems brought about by massive new housing estates. Yate’s teething problems in the 1960s had even made the national press. But undaunted, two decades on, work started on yet another new town just down the road.

It was the old Northavon Council planners who decided that 1,000 acres of land at Patchway Common was the ideal location.

Dr John Allinson, principal lecturer in town and country planning at the University of the West of England, has studied Bradley Stoke’s development and uses it as an example when teaching students about the pitfalls of new towns – and the ways of getting out of them.

He said: “Bradley Stoke has an interesting story, because the developers got it all terribly wrong there for many years. But it has now managed to pull itself back out of the mire. It remains a much-maligned place but actually these days it has a lot going for it.”

“The big problem, when they started developing Bradley Stoke in 1987, was that developers started from either end. The idea was to build lots of houses at the two ends, and then when they met in the middle, they would build a big shopping centre.

“But when the bottom fell out of the market in the early 1990s, property developers started going bust, and we were left with effectively two enormous housing estates with a massive patch of mud in the middle.

“The problem is, developers can make short-term money on building houses but they struggle with making quick cash on building services like shops, schools, civic buildings and health centres. They can make money on them in the long term, but not the short term.

“So all the families living in the houses that had been built at the end of the 1980s found they had no



**Joined together:** Where it was two

facilities in terms of shops, schools or civic buildings.

“Those living there had to get in their car and drive along a big dual carriageway whenever they wanted to do anything.”

There certainly had been some teething problems. The first scandal was when developer Lovell Homes was found to have used the wrong mix in its mortar. Seventeen homes were declared unsafe.

In one piece of unforgettable publicity, MP John Cope was shown pushing over a garden wall with his bare hands.

The homeowners were eventually moved out and the houses rebuilt.

Then there was the promised leisure centre, due to open its doors in 1996.

But the contractor went bust and it was not opened until three years later, and then only with the help of a National Lottery grant.

The provision of adequate health facilities for the new community was yet another big issue.

The first properly built one did not open until 1991 – before that the residents and doctors had to make do with an old portable building.

Just as the community was getting on its feet, Bristol-based architect George Ferguson, the then president of the Royal Institute of British Architects, said that, in his opinion, Bradley Stoke was “soulless and devoid of any inspiration”.

But the really big issue in the new

housing estates with a muddy field in the middle, Bradley Stoke is now a busy town with a population of around 20,000

**“**The big turning point for the area came with the arrival of the big Tesco superstore, which has recently become even bigger. Strange though it may sound, Tesco brought the community together

**Dr John Allinson, principal lecturer in town planning, UWE**

town’s brief history has been negative equity.

During the recession of the 1990s, many young couples and families were caught out as the bottom fell out of the property market.

This meant that homes were suddenly worth much less than had been paid for them. It led to the town being dubbed “Sadly Broke”.

Dr Allinson explains: “The problem of negative equity meant that hundreds of families found themselves stuck in this strange place that had never been finished.”

But he adds that things have improved dramatically over the last decade.

“Bradley Stoke has really managed to drag itself up by its boot strings, and now it’s an impressive place. It has six schools, a library, plenty of shops and a health centre.

“The big turning point for the area came with the arrival of the big Tesco superstore, which has recently



**‘Soulless’:** George Fergusson become even bigger. Strange though it may sound, Tesco brought the community together.

“While most of the country has about a 50 per cent loyalty to the

nearest supermarket, around 90 per cent of people in Bradley Stoke shop in the local Tesco. It’s a sort of community hub.

“And now the community really is progressing. There is a parish council and a parish magazine, and the schools have become particularly vibrant.

“All these things have the effect of bringing the community together as a unit, and giving residents living there a sense of an identity for Bradley Stoke.”

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**Community:** 90 per cent of people in Bradley Stoke shop in Tesco

**What’s your story?**

All this week we’re featuring news and features from Bradley Stoke in the *Evening Post*. If you’ve got a story about a community event, business or anything else, call reporter Dan Evans on 0117 9343232 or the newsdesk on 9343330. You can also email [d.evans@bepp.co.uk](mailto:d.evans@bepp.co.uk) or [epnews@bepp.co.uk](mailto:epnews@bepp.co.uk).

**“**I’ve seen it grow from being slightly disjointed and out on a limb, to a more cohesive community with shops, leisure centre and library



Alison Fishlock, 36, teacher, Bradley Stoke

**“**It’s great to have things like the library and leisure centre here now, but I don’t like the new Tesco – it’s too big



Sarah Deliot, 41, teaching assistant, Bradley Stoke

**“**I am from Peru – I moved here in 2002. We have all been welcomed warmly, and have settled happily in the area




Ursula Morrell, 36, housewife, Bradley Stoke

**“**It’s a nice area, with lots of facilities and a good transport network



Kate Fitzgerald, 23, primary school teacher, Bradley Stoke

**“**I’ve been here for 18 years. What I like is the location and the easy access to the motorways and the railway



David Chandler, 65, former town councillor

**Schools are good, the streets are clean, houses are nice and it’s safe for the boys. The cycle paths are good as well – we like everything about it**



David Woods, 45, works for Lloyds, Bradley Stoke

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