

RESPONSE TO BLUEPRINT CONSULTATION

BRAMDEAN & HINTON AMPNER

This document comprises comments from residents during, and following, the Open Meeting on 29th November. It should be noted that Bramdean & Hinton Ampner Parish Council has no pre-determined position or view upon any of the issues considered.

1. Communications

A reliable telephone service is a necessity. Broadband speeds need to be upgraded at the local exchange, especially crucial for people working from home. Mobile phone coverage must be improved for all users, many of whom are located in isolated locations.

Every effort should be made to keep village shops and post offices as they are often the main link for village communication. One suggestion is to encourage supermarkets who have taken over garage shops and “One Stop” convenience stores to put something back into the rural community by underwriting, or stocking a local store on a non-profit making basis. Utilise existing links for wider community purpose: eg Cheriton Primary School has a link to several local villages through parents of pupils.

Government should encourage webmasters by grant funding, and even payment of limited part time salaries, to develop existing parish websites as a local forum and hub of local information, easier to produce than a village magazine and of considerably greater use. Also improve training for non-internet users and provide help for users to increase skills, at local accessible venues.

“What’s On In and Around Alresford” and the “Alresford Forum” should combine to eliminate present unacceptable levels of duplication. HCC and WCC should reduce the amount of literature distributed to residents: in future in monochrome, necessary facts with no political or self-congratulatory bias.

2. Education

Older residents have been saddened by the loss of local primary schools. Access to local schools with minimum travel is best for under-11’s and fosters local friendships. With the expansion of the neighbouring villages, Cheriton Primary School already has little spare capacity. Children from Bramdean and Hinton Ampner, whose parents may well have lived in catchment for many years, can be denied access in favour of new arrivals and have no option but to attend schools away from their home area, creating transport problems and isolation from local friends. When Hinton Ampner School was closed, parents were promised that children from Bramdean and Hinton Ampner would always be assured of a place at Cheriton Primary School: recent alternatives have been Winnal and Preston Candover.

Primary school admissions policy should be overhauled to prevent parents receiving places at local state schools if they intend moving their children to an independent school at KS2.

Current projections may suggest a decline in the school age child population but the reality is fierce competition for places at local primary schools. The situation must be monitored carefully with proactive planning to allow a new school to be built if the trend is upwards.

Reassess all secondary school places in the locality: at present Perins can accommodate the pyramid of local primary feeder schools but this may not continue if a larger school is not built at Sun Hill.

Further education appears to be fully provided either in Winchester or Alton. However, lifelong learning will be very important as the population ages: there should be more outreach services from Adult Education Centres, even if class sizes are small.

3. Employment

The rise in pension age will mean longer working lives. Working from home will reduce commuting but increase the need for the social elements of work: local support groups/coffee shops/ lunchtime venues.

Since local employment opportunities have been limited since agriculture became highly mechanised, new rural employment is vital, particularly for the sensible reuse of old farm buildings and to support local tourism, perhaps as holiday accommodation. The control of access transport along country lanes is of overwhelming importance. The question of increased employment is also tied to housing provision, if not increased traffic flows and car usage will be the result. Government proposals to asset strip national forestry, and cuts in resources limiting councils' abilities to maintain countryside access, recreation and nature conservation, likely cuts in DEFRA expenditure on farm diversification and conservation, will destroy most hopes of employment in countryside management.

4. Housing

Despite concerns that additional housing would change the parish "character", a majority of respondents support affordable housing for local people, eg in partnership with a housing association, possibly 10 houses built preferably by conversion of redundant farm buildings or brown field sites. A survey to establish whether new housing is necessary should be conducted. Regarding "more low cost housing in villages" older people and those on low incomes or benefits prefer to live in areas where there are more services and less need for (expensive) travel.

It is vital to redress the balance whereby former agricultural cottages have been converted into 5-6 bedroom houses permanently beyond the means of many local people. Landowners might also be given incentives to sell redundant agricultural cottages for refurbishment by local young first time buyers.

Another housing option is Homeshare which involves a Householder with a home that they are willing to share at a stage in their life when they need some help and support and a Homesharer who is willing to give some help in exchange for somewhere to stay. This scheme is already operational in England: both parties benefit from the arrangement and the costs are very low.

Elderly people do not want to leave the area but can see that this might be inevitable, particularly once they are unable to drive, due to limited public transport and lack of local shopping facilities. This age group wants to be independent, not continually reliant upon family or friends.

5. Planning

Planning should remain a locally controlled process, seen to be firm but fair. Issues are seldom clear cut and a local perspective is invaluable. In the past, insufficient planning resources have led to unwise outcomes and an inflexible approach has stifled small local land developments that would be of long term advantage to the community.

Local authorities must have adequate resources: how to control illegal development must not rely on whether councils have more money to defend their decision than the applicant has to fight it.

Local people would welcome the reassessment of laws governing the illegal encroachment of land by travellers; too often the landowner is left without any hope of getting rid of travellers who seem to possess all the legal and moral rights. However, sometimes it could be beneficial for land owners to accept an agreed level and term of encroachment in return for some benefit.

Planning policy should respect communities and protect the countryside. Future policy should consider the local impact of South Downs National Park: eg tourism, parking, increased traffic on rural roads.

6. Transport

To enable all sections of the community to live in a rural community it must be accepted in future planning that personal transport is a necessity. However, there will always be a group of mainly elderly or single people with below average incomes who do not own a car but need to attend doctors, shop, go out for recreation, etc. The continual scaling down of hospital cars, bus routes and timetables, day centre transport, etc, will leave this group very vulnerable.

For most residents, not owning a car leaves children and young people isolated, mothers unable to shop and is likely to give the bread winner problems travelling to work. Sadly, taxation relating to personal transport takes no account of ability to pay, there are no tax breaks for low income groups and fuel is often more expensive in rural areas.

Therefore, better public transport is needed with more frequent buses and cheaper fares. The option of travel tokens should be reinstated: an over-60s bus pass is useless if you live 2½ miles from the nearest bus stop. There should be better use of buses as multi-use vehicles: eg post buses, delivering prescriptions, etc. There could be local neighbourhood buses: supermarkets encouraged to invest some of their profits to provide a service to bus people to and from their shops. There is agreement that there should be no erosion of present services as they are already minimal.

Car-sharing schemes to Winchester and the station should be promoted. Transport for secondary/college pupils should be considered - preferably via the public bus service.

Roads should be well maintained. The surfaces of the side roads and lanes are in great need of repair and hazardous in wintry conditions.

Cycle ways should be developed along existing bridleways as cyclists are no longer safe on the main roads.

Green methods of transport should be promoted and must be achieved.

The past two decades have seen an enormous increase in the flow of heavy traffic on the A272. The A272 along with the M27-A27 are the only two east-west roads in this part of the county. The A272 has become a "rat run" between the A3 and the M3 or A34.

A better link is urgently needed between the M3 and A34 at Winnal: the present road from the A31 and A272 onto the M3 north and A34 is very hazardous. A journey to Newbury usually takes 35 minutes but can take 20 minutes longer via the Winnal intersection before 10.30am most weekdays.

7. Recreation

The parish lacks a meeting point. Older residents regret the transition of "The Fox" from a "village pub" to a "food pub". Some residents also feel that the increase in women working away from the home has decreased opportunities for neighbourly contact: eg over a cup of coffee.

The childrens' play area needs to be maintained. More facilities are needed for teenagers and young people. A needs assessment is required.

Open spaces, footways and footpaths are very important, and should be maintained for resident and visitor alike. There is concern for the future provision and adequate resource for these facilities. Present plans for the Forestry Commission could see great areas of woodland and landscape (which the taxpayer has paid to have developed since the last war) locked back into private ownership with denied access, shooting as the main land use, and loss of productive timber.

8. Other comments

A grit bin is urgently needed for Woodlane Close, so accessible last winter that the roadway had to be privately cleared of snow twice in January 2010. A grit bin is at present denied on the grounds of insufficient gradient,

A mobile doctor service would be helpful, particularly for the elderly

An extensive needs assessment is required as to what needs professional input/execution/ analysis. There is a limit to the amount of time and effort that volunteers can be expected to provide.

Lack of real progress in rural policing and an inadequate justice system should remain high on the list for action in the next two decades.

Expansion of networks to rural areas: eg cable, fibre optic internet, gas.

An agreed energy policy, local initiatives and central government funding to encourage provision and use of small energy providers perhaps through locally based reusable sources. The continued burning of expensive gas or oil imported from politically volatile countries must be reduced. These issues will inevitably impact on housing, transport, employment, and the sustainability of rural life.

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