

# Consultation Meetings

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## March 8<sup>th</sup> Otterford Parish Hall

Attendees were given a short presentation describing activity towards developing a Blackdown Hills Community Plan. They looked at data sets relating to the key issues emerging from Parish Plans and Priority responses and were then invited to comment and offer their views. These are collated below:

### Traffic and Public Transport:

Concern expressed which concurred with Parish Plans and Priority responses.

- **Traffic: through routes run across parishes connecting destinations outside the AONB, also to commercial areas in Dunkeswell and Hemyock.**
- **Much HGV traffic is not using advisory routes.**
- **Inappropriate SatNav mapping is blamed for HGV routing, improve signage?**
- **Traffic speed is thought to be too high in many settlements.**
- **Public Transport: some parishes have regular bus routes, others lying off main roads have initiated very local schemes (fare car, or community minibus). Other parishes could benefit if schemes could be shared/extended**
- **Road maintenance: need more communication with DCC/SCC Highways groups**

### Suggested outcomes

- Development of a transport group, with sub groups set up to consider specific issues
- Widening access to local transport schemes
- Sub groups clustered in catchment areas (Yarty, Otter, Culm) which provide exits from the AONB to connect with main roads and public transport nodes.
- A group to work with County, District and Police authorities to discuss maintenance issues/ HGVs/speed/parking.

### Aim:

- Share best practice in neighbouring parishes
- Extend transport provision where it exists to include inner/smaller parishes
- Improve opportunities for community to travel within the Blackdowns and to surrounding towns and rail transport (particularly for local daily commuters)
- Improve existing knowledge of public transport provision.
- Influence decisions re through-routes, HGV access, signage

### Housing and Built Environment

The main point is the planning process – several people expressed concern about the consistency of decision making at District Council level, together with lack of communication/feedback on parish input. Some positive points were raised: Input of AONB Planning officer acknowledged in influencing a design issue in one parish. Another parish cited a planning agreement with its local authority.

### Suggested outcomes:

- Determine the extent of inconsistent or inappropriate planning decisions within the Blackdown Hills area.

- Localism Bill - prepare by developing planning clusters around issues in readiness for Neighbourhood Planning. Possible clusters could focus on low cost housing, care home provision.
- Create clusters to receive appropriate training
- Provide community level links/knowledge base spanning boundaries between neighbouring districts to promote consistency of decision making for the community as a whole.

#### **Aims:**

- Improve relationship between parishes and Local Authority Planners to ensure that community views are properly considered and fed into the planning process.
- Develop local expertise so that planning decisions are considered with full understanding of powers available to influence outcomes.
- Develop a 'masterplan' for influencing planning decisions affecting Blackdowns community.

### **Community Facilities**

– several parishes expressed a desire to improve/build community halls through their Parish Plans and Priority responses. At the meeting it was highlighted that the Blagdon Hill area is particularly poorly provided for.

#### **Suggested outcomes:**

- Set up a group to undertake a Blackdown Hills wide review of existing community buildings and their level of use. Include churches and chapels in this review, engage with appropriate authorities for information.
- Consider opportunities to utilise existing buildings more effectively for community activities/outlets/community shop PO etc. cf recent experience in Churchinford where village shop/PO closed suddenly – community has established a community shop and coffee mornings twice a week in the Village hall.
- Encourage sharing of facilities in neighbouring parishes, could promote community integration and reduce costs/new build.

#### **Aims:**

- To bring partially used buildings into more efficient use
- Increase revenue stream to little used buildings to enable improved maintenance by relevant management groups.
- Increase interaction between neighbouring communities.

### **Technology and Communications:**

Concern expressed at the meeting about access to information at all levels, from parish magazines to high speed broadband and interactive web access.

#### **Suggested outcomes:**

- Develop a Parish magazine/web-site editors' forum to share and disseminate news of general interest, encourage use of 'View from the Blackdowns' as a pan-Blackdown Hills 'voice' for all.
- Encourage parishes/businesses with poor mobile and broad band access to work together on solving their problems – focus group to lobby providers on behalf of Blackdowns communities?

### **Aims:**

- better informed community
- improved communications
- develop a voice for rural communities

**Community Facilities:** Improve access to recycling facilities for non-kerbside collected waste - many Blackdown Hills residents experience restricted collections, or have to travel up to 30 miles for a round trip to a municipal recycling facility.

### **Suggested Action:**

- Investigate opportunities for contracting with private waste management companies to site recycling skips at the premises of small and light industrial units in some parishes for local public use.

### **Aims:**

- Encourage recycling
- A more sustainable solution to waste removal
- Opportunity for partnership working

## **March 16<sup>th</sup> Luppitt Village Hall**

Following a short presentation about the development of the Blackdown Hills Community Plan to date, attendees were invited to look at data sets describing views expressed through the Parish Plans and Priority responses before working in groups to complete a short questionnaire. The consultation concluded with an open discussion session.

Collated responses to questionnaire:

**1. Using the list of priorities you have read about, use the following questions to help us understand how you think the Blackdowns community might tackle the issues raised.**

### **• Traffic and transport**

- winter gritting – share access to communal equipment eg Luppitt has its own spreader
- Blanket 40 mph limit throughout AONB to improve safety, deter unnecessary traffic, and reduce environmental damage
- Employ a community lengthsman collectively
- Rural transport – fuel prices prohibitive. Need to ensure that public/ community transport is used, five year subsidy might enable development of a sustainable service. Farecar scheme can work but publicity is essential. Examine volunteer driver and or Ring & Ride schemes.
- How to deal with large vehicles in narrow lanes designated 'Unsuitable for lorries'

### **• Broadband and Communication**

- BB speed is a very patchy and a major disadvantage in some areas, need to examine others' solutions eg satellite/cable
- Communication and cascading of information

### **• Planning:**

- Inconsistency in planning decisions
- Examine cross boundary planning issues

- Affordable Housing might be an action for individual parishes, however to combat inconsistency in planning decisions need to be aware of individual cases and variation of decisions between neighbouring districts. Involve AONB where appropriate
- Need for a joint approach in EDDC area
- More say and influence called for

- **Supporting and promoting food production**

- Support for agricultural sector and an opportunity to create a Blackdown Hills brand

- **Purchasing power**

- **Provide economy of scale by group purchasing**

2. What group working mechanism can you suggest so that the whole group or cluster gains from working together? If you think that different issues could benefit from different approaches, please briefly describe these other mechanisms.

- More of a lead from AONB
- Committee of PC Chairs
- Meeting of EDDC parishes re planning issues
- Sharing information
- Get parish magazine editors together
- PR reports/minutes from parishes to View from the Blackdowns
- Deal with local issues within a cluster group.
- Overall policy in planning, traffic etc needs to be determined – would require dedicated core funding.

3. Taking three of the issues you have identified in question 1 above, who else would you invite into the cluster to discuss the issue? How and what would do you think they would contribute to an effective partnership?

- **Traffic: South West Highways and Atkins, Neil Parish and other MPs (some issues may need national lobbying/legislation)**
- **Broadband: BT – what happened to the DCC/SCC broadband project?**
- **Planning: Planners from each district to share details of requirements and ascertain variations between districts**
- **For each issue would invite the Ward Councillor and CC personnel with relevant remits.**

4. If you or your Parish Council was invited to join such a group to work on any of the issues, what would be your (or the PC's) reaction?

- Yes, if it were fruitful. Would we be listened to?
- Yes, if of local relevance and concern and there is an outcome
- Suggest designating a person within each PC to act as co-ordinator/clerk for each cluster
- Yes, suggest a Councillor or parish rep to work within the cluster
- OK to attend meetings, but clusters will need a professional/paid chair or activist/co-ordinator

## 5. Which of the issues identified would you feel most interested/qualified to take forward within a group or cluster?

- **Housing**
- **Work with an existing employment site in parish to provide more community benefit**
- **Economy of scale**
- **Would depend on relevance for immediately local issues**
- **Planning**
- **HGV traffic**

After the group sessions, these participants all joined in a general discussion.

The following points were made:

1. Core funding would be needed to support work for action on the bigger issues, particularly where governmental lobbies may be required.
2. Planning – everyone present had issues over planning, all felt that the more collective experience that can be gathered together, the greater the influence that can be brought to bear on the relevant District. On occasion, District planning decisions have appeared to be at odds with County strategy. Distinct lack of consistency, not only between Districts, but also between individual planning officers within a District. Lack of communication between, for example, planning and highways when siting new developments (eg inadequate drainage provision (highways) at the new school in Chardstock led to expensive remedial costs being borne by education authorities with no recourse to highways).
3. Strong view emerged that while all Devon parishes contribute to Devon Association of Local Councils (DAPC), they have received very little support or guidance in return. Perception that the activity of DAPC is not evenly distributed across the county. A more structured link to DAPC would be valued.
4. Role of the AONB cannot be divorced from the community – the landscape, environment and the community are inextricably linked.

### **Collective working sought for**

- **Traffic/Roads/Public transport/HGV intrusion**
- **Planning - Influence outcomes and tackle inconsistency in District Council/s decision making**
- **Work together on economy of scale in purchasing and services**
- **Communications – better information sharing, address broadband access and inefficiencies**
- **Support needed to assist the community to implement recommendations of the Plan – dedicated core funding needed.**