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BLACKMORE VILLAGE HERITAGE AND THE LDP JULY 2018

DISCUSSION PAPER TO INITIATE FURTHER DEBATE TO CREATE A FUTURE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR BLACKMORE VILLAGE.

1. CONTEXT AND UNDERSTANDING

Between January 2016 and the January 2018 iteration of the Brentwood Borough Council Local Development Plan (BBC/LDP), the status of development sites previously identified within Blackmore Village (076 and 077) has changed from being excluded to included in the LDP. This amounts to 96 dwellings or an increase of almost 30% in terms of total housing numbers.

If allowed to proceed it will change the character of historic Blackmore Village, and its heritage, forever. In addition it risks diluting the strong community that exists in the Village. There are very few villages in the Brentwood area that have a thriving sense of community. The scale and level of the proposed development undermines the culture and ethos of the Village and runs contrary to the vision of BBC 'we will continue to protect our key assets including the environment, heritage and character of the Borough'.

The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to summarise what has happened locally since the meeting at BBC offices on 22 May 2018 and a follow up discussion with Jonathan Quilter (JQ) on 19th June 2018. It is an evidence based report, which we felt obliged to research and write, given our concerns about engagement and interest during the Reg 18 consultation process. Our initiative led to 401 written responses to our survey.

BBC has agreed to meet again at your offices on 31st July 2018 and our exit objective from that meeting is to initiate constructive debate between BBC, Blackmore, Hook End and Wyatts Green Parish Council (PC) and our recently created 'Blackmore Village Heritage' group (of interested residents – BVH). Such debate should cover periods pre and post Reg 19, and this discussion paper therefore represents a starting point and, hopefully, a good base from which to build our credibility.



One of the key aims of BVH is to improve communication at all levels, and to repair fracture lines between the BBC, the PC and the residents. We also wish to make some clear recommendations to ensure a more open dialogue in the future.

2. BACKGROUND AND KEY SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

2.1 Please initially refer back to the PC submission in February 2018, in response to the BBC's LDP (Reg 18) consultation process. The comments are well made, endorsed by BVH, and do not require repeating in full in this paper.

BVH was formed in June 2018 to follow up BBC's agreement to allow us to provide further evidence as part of the consultation process, and ahead of Reg 19 in September. We agreed a deadline of 31st July with JQ. What the BVH group has done during the past month is:-

- Produce a Residents' Survey in two parts (see Appendix 1).
- A small group of people have knocked on every door in Blackmore Village, and spoken face to face with residents.
- The purpose was to explain/reiterate what the LDP is all about and ask them to complete the survey in order to: a) give residents the opportunity to express what they really think and b) provide BVH with firm evidence to discuss with BBC and the PC and to bring focus to future debate.
- Every BVH representative reports back that knowledge levels about the LDP, and specifically the scale of the proposed development in Blackmore Village, were at a very low level. We will provide further supporting information on request.
- We also canvassed many of the numerous visitors to Blackmore Village (e.g. a table at the recent music festival, setting up on the village green, face to face discussion with visiting cycling clubs etc). We are providing their views as further evidence too, as clearly the reason why they come to Blackmore (and help ensure the sustainability of the Village 'the way it is') is that this is a very special, attractive, historic Village, incorporating a conservation area, surrounded by beautiful green-belt land teeming with wildlife.
- A summary of the BVH evidence is included in Appendix 2. We also have a binder with all written responses, plus a summary of some ad-verbatim comments in Appendix 3.



2.2 We are keen to demonstrate that we have gathered a truly representative range of responses to our survey. At the time of writing the numbers are as follows:-

- A Total of 401 survey forms completed, of which 306 are from residents of the PC area. To place this in context there are around 300 households in the Village.
- From the Village itself 290 residents support our campaign to protect the Green Belt with only 7 in favour of the development of sites 076 and 077. Very few people refused to respond, one way or the other.
- From Part 2 of the survey (Supplementary Questionnaire), the vast majority of residents would not subscribe to any further development on the scale proposed, would support in-fill building and brown field development (endorsing the LDP position of January 2016, i.e. pre Reg 18), and in any event would want any schemes to be focused on the needs of the elderly (e.g. Villagers wishing to down-size) and for first time buyers (especially children of existing residents).
- Another concern is that, if allowed to proceed, the number of 96 dwellings could rise further, bearing in mind that in an earlier iteration of the LDP, a figure of 90 dwellings was mentioned for field 077 on its own (Woollard Way).
- There is also virtually unanimous agreement that the infrastructure of the Village will not support a significant number of additional dwellings.

3. THE KEY ISSUES TO DISCUSS IN DEPTH

We firmly believe sites 076 and 077 should be removed from the LDP, and we endorse all that the Parish Council has previously said.

3.1 Village Infrastructure and Amenities

96 houses on sites 076 and 077 (possibly more on the latter?) plus other potential schemes we hear about e.g.: developers have acquired Red Rose Farm – which immediately stretches the Village ‘envelope’; a small scale development adjacent to the church is also rumoured; plus Epping Forest schemes (e.g. the site in Fingrith Hall Lane – the former Norton Heath Riding School, some 30+ houses), all add up to the Village infrastructure breaking under the strain.

In particular:-

The Village School. It is already full, and existing residents tell us they are having to send their children to schools in other locations.



The Doctors Surgery. As you have heard previously, waiting times for pre-booked appointments are approximately ONE MONTH. We have tested this recently and it remains the same or marginally worse.

Vehicle volumes and Parking. Around Horsefayre Green and the Co-op we already have a massive problem. The photographs in Appendix 4 around the corner of the Green and Fingrith Hall Road are typical, and the Co-op remains busy for a lot of the day. Cars are parked on double yellow lines and on the bend etc, and with cyclists ever present in the Village (many of whom drive here and park along Fingrith Hall Road) it seems only a matter of time before there will be an accident. Residents often call in at the Co-op on their way in and out of the Village, so more residents will mean more traffic chaos.

Transport corridors. Reliance on privately owned vehicles will continue to be a feature across our parish, due to the absence of other, effective, communication links. Again, more cars will compound existing problems.

3.2 Flood risk

We understand that an updated flood risk assessment is still to be undertaken? As part and parcel of this, and through personal knowledge of Villagers who have lived in Blackmore for many years, we wish to reinforce previous comments about the real risks posed by concreting over more of our fields.

By way of example, in August 1987 the village was inundated to the extent that many homes were seriously flooded. We have a photo album provided by resident Judy Wood, a picture board highlighting the depth of water along several roads (including Red Rose Lane), and other anecdotal evidence detailed in our survey.

This is not a 'one off', indeed, as recently as 2016, houses around the Green were flooded and the Village was temporarily 'cut off' again.

3.3 Current and future sustainability of Blackmore Village

Some may refer back to the previous large-scale development in the 1960's as a precedent for developing sites 076 and 077 during the coming decade. What actually happened in the 60's, 70's and 80's is that new blood entered the Village, many of whom are still active and have created a thriving community.

We have the Village Hall, Sports Field, MUGA, numerous Clubs and Societies, the bi-annual Village Fayre, the annual music festival, a reinvigorated Leather Bottle (plus recent/to come enhancements to the Prince Albert and The Bull), two busy tea rooms/antiques shop, a very busy Co-op store/Post Office and active church communities.

We also have numerous visitors on a daily basis, and this adds to the reality of a thriving, sustainable Village environment. Indeed, several of the local businesses have actively supported BVH in putting up our campaign posters, speaking with customers and helping us to complete our survey.



Whilst for some businesses more houses will mean more potential customers, none of the people we have spoken with want to see development on the scale proposed. Most, in fact, believe the Blackmore economy benefits from its existing attractiveness.

For this and many other reasons, we conclude that far from improving the sustainability of the Village, large scale housing developments will actually lead to a deterioration in the lives of Blackmore Village residents and our Heritage.

3.4 Green Belt/Village 'envelope' and contained development

- Red Rose lane is too narrow to provide access to sites 076 and 077.
- It is not a 'natural boundary' and indeed, is breached immediately once Red Rose Farm is developed.
- The fields adjacent to Woollard Way and Orchard Piece are teeming with a wide variety of wildlife (birds, fowl, rabbits, foxes, etc etc). We are raising our concerns with Essex Wildlife Trust, and intend to enlist their support if at all possible. Owls Bats
+ Newts
- We appreciate that some Green Belt land will have to be released for development if BBC is to meet its target of 7600 new homes, but there needs to be proportionate share of the burden across the Borough, across the Villages, taking into consideration all the other points made in this paper. A 30% increase in housing in this historic Village not only does not make sense, it is plain unfair.
- Looking purely at numbers, and deducting the Dunton Garden Suburb development from the overall target of 7600, then deducting Brown field sites and in-fill, existing planning consents etc. a fairer way to look at this on Green Belt terms is to work on percentages, and ask each Parish to come up with plans for its 'fair share', producing jointly owned strategies with BBC.
- In Reg 18 LDP, there are other sites within the BBC area that appear more logical for development - for example in Brentwood and Ingatestone town centres. Furthermore as one of our ad-verbatim quotes highlights there are a total of 43 Green Belt sites on the edge of larger villages, of which 37 were discounted and, of the remaining 6, Blackmore represents 57% of the proposed total allocation.
- We have already demonstrated how Rother District Council and Salehurst & Robertsbridge PC approached the LDP, via a Neighbourhood Plan (one of many examples across the UK), and even if it is now too late to back-track, a more strategic approach to this is necessary, before Reg 19 is signed off.



3.5 Heritage Issues

We intend to investigate and enlist support from recognised bodies. With many listed buildings of historic interest and a Conservation area within the Village, we hope to provide additional evidence to support a case for significantly reducing the impact of the LDP on Blackmore Village.

4 OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES THAT BVH WISH TO DISCUSS WITH THE BBC AND THE PC

4.1 Traveller Settlements

The ever growing Travellers site on Chelmsford Road. During the course of discussions with residents this is another issue that generates much 'heat'. Apart from the illegal nature of the site (what is happening about that?), there is further impact on Village infrastructure and the Village 'climate'.

4.2 Driving speeds through the village

These are already anti-social and dangerous. We urgently need a 20 mph speed limit and measures to enforce it. Residents, including BVH supporters, are willing to assist in a neighbourhood initiative. One of the many consequences of this is that the Duck Ponds (which are a focal point of the Village) were once teeming with wild life including a large number of ducks. Years of speeding traffic hurtling through the Village has sadly killed scores of them. This year for the first time in at least 3 years a group of six ducklings hatched, it appears all of them have been run over on the road between the two ponds.

