

**SHOULD BARFORD ST MARTIN HAVE A PLAN FOR CHANGE?
Report to Parish Council May 2013**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Aims

The aim of this report is to advise Barford St Martin Parish Council on the options available for more community involvement in future plans for the village.

Objectives

The report identifies the options available, discusses the pros and cons of each and recommends the actions required to involve the residents of Barford.

Annexures to the report provide a legacy of research and analysis should the residents be prepared to invest their time and expertise to draw up a plan for the future of Barford.

Background

In December 2010 central government produced a green paper on "Localism and Decentralisation".

The Parish Council was inundated with information, both electronically and in hard copy. It became apparent that developers were interested in the change of policy in planning and there was much interest on the internet. Organisations such as the National Trust and the Council for the Protection of Rural England wrote papers and Wiltshire council organised information sessions.

It became apparent that the amount of work sifting out all this information and deciding on whether any action was needed was far too big a task for one person, or even the whole parish council.

It was important to involve and inform the whole village, but before this could be done there was a need to understand what the information was about.

Last year a controversial planning application was approved even though it had been opposed by the parish, local and regional planning committees. Attending the appeal at local council level, when the decisions were overturned, it was apparent that some sort of written plan was essential to enable those people involved with making decisions to understand the local environment.

A working party was set up of interested people 3 parish councillors (Bruce Dunton, Graham wells, and Sheila Sheppard), Gordon Pitcher, and June Fardell.

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2. WHAT HAS BEEN DONE AND WHY.

Research- options available

The first action of the Group was to carry out research to determine the potential impacts of new planning regulations on Barford and whether the parish needs to do anything to ensure that future development would not be detrimental to parishioners.

The Ministerial Foreword to National Planning Policy Framework, March 2012, Department for Communities and Local Government seems to be reassuring. It states - *The purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development. Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don't mean worse lives for future generations. Development means growth.*

This document also refers to *Neighbourhood Plans prepared by a Parish Council.....*
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/2116950.pdf>

It was quickly determined that advice from Wiltshire Council was very limited and that it was necessary to look elsewhere for authoritative information. Further research discovered other, apparently authoritative, sources of information. In addition two other potential options for Barford: a Parish Plan and a Village Design Statement and there is of course the option of maintaining and improving the status quo. The four options are-

- Retain Present Situation
- Neighbourhood Plan
- Parish Plan
- Village Design Statement

The options are defined and discussed below.

[A list of documents consulted is included in Appendix A – Useful Links.]

Identification of planning issues

To obtain some understanding of the planning issues important to Barford an analysis of the Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and threats [SWOT] was carried out. This identified three linear features over which the parish has little control –B3089, River Nadder and Salisbury to Exeter railway, of these the B3089 is the most important. Other major factors identified are village now does not have a school, a doctor's surgery or a major employer. The village is a designated conservation area within Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. [Appendix B].

Issues to be resolved

A number of issues have been identified that need to be resolved. [Appendix C –Issues List]

3. WHAT HAS BEEN FOUND OUT AND IMPLICATIONS - TYPES OF PLANS

Parish Plans

In 2000 the Rural white paper (our Countryside: The Future) described a way local communities would be able to transform their local environment in the form of a Parish Plan. These holistic plans covered everything from police, education, the natural environment, as well as planning and were meant to be evolving documents, outlining how a community would like to develop over the next 10 years and usually included an action plan detailing how these developments would be achieved.

Over 4 years 1,000 parish plans were produced, unfortunately the plans were very different from each other and were often ignored by planners and developers of services who sometimes perceived them as examples of NIMBYISM (not in my back yard).

In 2006 DEFRA (the Department for the environment, food and Rural Affairs) appointed SQW to produce a report (the integration of parish plans into the wider system of government) .This report, although long, is an excellent example of the way communities can enable change to come about.

An important comment was made by ACRE, in their "tool kit". "Parish and community plans should be comprehensive, considering all social economic and environmental issues of concern to the community".

Many recommendations were made one of which was "a practical approach to planning is required if parish plans are to influence the top down planning process"

Village Design Statement (VDS)

The purpose of a VDS is to manage change, whether that change is major new development or just cumulative, small-scale additions and alterations. They are not about whether development should take place, but about how planned development should be carried out so that it is in harmony with its setting and contributes to the conservation and, where possible, enhances the local environment.

VDSs are prepared by local communities. They offer a framework for engaging local people in constructive debate about defining the special character of their village, as a basis for ensuring that new development in their area fits its surroundings and is in keeping with that character. The VDS can help everyone involved in a development to understand local views and perceptions at the outset of the design process. This helps new buildings to be designed in a way that is more likely to gain local support, rather than generate opposition. VDSs provide a tool to help manage long-term change, not prevent it.

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Currently, VDSs can either be approved by a local planning authority as a material planning consideration or adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD). Both 'material considerations' and Supplementary Planning Documents must be considered for all planning applications along with all the other relevant planning guidance.

Approving a VDS as material planning consideration seems to be the now preferred method as opposed to a SPD, as they are seen as a faster and simplified way forward. Their approval by Committee, following an Officer appraisal of the VDS including an assessment of the robustness of the consultation undertaken to inform its preparation, gives the documents weight in decision making. The Council in approving VDSs as a material consideration will ensure that these are taken into account in determining planning applications. VDSs have also been given weight by Planning Inspectors in individual planning appeal cases.

Neighbourhood Plan

Neighbourhood planning is a new tier of the planning system which seeks to give communities more control over the future of their area. Neighbourhood planning is intended to provide an opportunity to change attitudes towards development through positive engagement by local communities. The Government envisages that through new processes such as neighbourhood planning, communities can benefit from new development.

A neighbourhood plan can establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a defined area. The plan might specify, for example, where new homes and offices should be built, and what they should look like. The plan sets a vision for the future, and can be detailed or general depending on what local people want.

Neighbourhood planning is a tool to promote sustainable development and will not be able to prevent development in an area. Neighbourhood plans can only include proposals for an equal (or greater) amount of growth than is set out in the local authority's development plan. They must also accord to national planning policy.

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4. DISCUSSION

Retain Present Situation.

To the present Barford has not produced a plan for the village. Planning guidance is determined by the Local Plan produced by Wiltshire which incorporates a detailed planning map produced by the former Salisbury District Council. This map designates most of the village as a "conservation area" within Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB. Barford is designated as a small village with only infill development deemed to be sustainable.

There is perceived to be a significant problem with the present system of notification of planning applications, in that residents most likely to be affected by proposed changes may be unaware of the proposals until it is too late for them to comment.

There is a recent upsurge in community interest engendered by jubilee celebrations and an associated application for a grant for improvements to the village field. A formal plan representing the views and wishes of all residents would build on the recent initiatives.

**Produce a Plan for Barford – Pros and Cons
Parish Plan**

Advantages:

- a. Covers more issues than "planning" e.g. when the group produced a SWOT analysis transport, no gas connection, no village hall, low crime, broadband speed, sense of community, history, fishing, low light pollution were a few of the issues that were discussed. These would be unlikely to be included in a Neighbourhood plan
- b. The parish plan could provide a mandate for the parish council to set priorities for the future. It could demonstrate to parishioners the need for an increase in the precept.
- c. It would enable the diverse groups in the village e.g. the fete committee, to be part of the planning action.
- d. Working with other villages in the area could be encouraged and the differing strengths be reflected in the parish plan e.g. the community transport group.
- e. The plan would be open ended and reviewed annually.
- f. Less demanding in skills, expertise and effort than Neighbourhood Plan

Disadvantages of a parish plan:

- a. It is not accepted as a supplementary planning document by the planners .

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- b. The report commissioned by DEFRA in 2007 on Parish Plans commented on restraints in Parish Plans and the newer village design statement and neighbourhood plans appear to have taken action to improve the acceptability of community plans by the statutory authorities, but limited the scope.

If the sole purpose of a plan for Barford is to produce a document that can be accepted by planning authorities and used to influence change in planning the development of the village, a Parish Plan is not a good choice.

If the village as a whole would like to influence a wider audience and build on community involvement that has already started a Parish Plan could be considered.

It would be important to identify the aims of producing the document whether it is for the best interests of Barford St Martin or Wiltshire Council.

Village Design Statement

Advantages:

- a. Allows the village to have an input into planning decisions and must be considered in planning applications.
- b. The community and local planners get a greater understanding of what forms the village i.e. history, landscape setting of village, nature of the buildings themselves, shape of settlement, areas of natural beauty, transport links and what makes up the community.
- c. Allows the community to have greater involvement in how they would like to see the village (within the confines of the local planning policy).
- d. A number of VDSs have already been produced and approved these could be used as guidance in producing one ourselves.

Disadvantages:

- a. It does not carry the same weight as a Neighbourhood Plan, in that it does not become adopted as part of the Wiltshire Local Plan.
- b. An effective VDS takes a considerable amount of effort for the community to produce, taking between 12 to 24 months, although it would need far less effort than a neighbourhood plan.
- c. Unless we have members of the village who are willing to give their time and skills to be able to create a VDS, there will be a cost to produce one which would be dependent on what effort we would need to outsource. This might make the production of a VDS prohibitive from a financial perspective.

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Neighbourhood Plan

Neighbourhood Plans can build on Community Led Plans and offer an opportunity for communities to decide what development they want to see. This may be for community projects such as schools and village halls.

Advantages:

- a. They are also a statutory instrument, part of planning law and can ensure site-specific protection is given to areas where development or change of use would not be desirable.
- b. Local Authority cooperation is assured and has statutory status
- c. If approved, the policies outlined in the Neighbourhood Plan become part of the Wiltshire Local Plan. This means that there is less opportunity for a developer to build the type or style of development that the community does not wish to see, provided that the plan is robust.
- d. Parishes with a Neighbourhood Plan in place will benefit from 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) rather than the standard 15% i.e. Barford Parish Council would get to spend this money in Barford.

Disadvantages

The main disadvantage to a Neighbourhood Plan is that it may be unjustifiable effort and cost for just a small village such as Barford that has no planned development. Other considerations are:

- a. A Neighbourhood Plan can be as detailed or specific as required, although every time additions need to be made, it requires going through the process again.
- b. Neighbourhood Plans can be costly and funds need to be applied for.
- c. They are time consuming and could take in the region of two years to complete.

If Barford were to embark on an Neighbourhood Plan it is most likely that it would be necessary to form one in conjunction with neighbouring parishes such as Dinton (although Dinton does have planned development), or a wider grouping based on the Nadder Valley or Wilton.

There is currently no planned development for Barford therefore it is necessary to asses if there is a great risk of someone proposing something that the community does not want. If there is a risk, and no plan was in place then the community would have little control, and would only be able to object to the proposal. If there is no risk then the extra work might be unnecessary

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5. CONCLUSIONS

- a. Residents are largely unaware
 - i. of local plans for development in Barford.
 - ii. how to become involved in planning process.
- b. If the residents are to become more involved in the future development of Barford steps are need to consult the whole community to:
 - i. discover their views on the future development for the village.
 - ii. discuss the planning options available.
 - iii. determine the resources necessary for each option and the willingness to contribute either in effort/skills, or financially through the Parish Precept.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- c. Residents should be consulted to determine whether they:
 - i. wish to become more involved in future development of village.
 - ii. are prepared to contribute to the resources required to produce a plan that reflects the needs of the whole community.