



Pitcombe Parish Plan 2015

FOREWORD

THE STATUS OF CURRENT PARISH PLANNING

Where are we?

This is a draft of a new Pitcombe Parish Plan 2015, the aim of which is to provide an opportunity for residents to study and have input before it is finalised.

The Initial Plan (IP), launched in 2014, was based on analysis of responses by residents to a Questionnaire covering specific issues. This provided a platform for the development of wider ranging and longer-term policy, which is the intended focus for Pitcombe Plan 2015. Some of the content of the IP is repeated in appropriate sections of this plan to preserve extant analysis and provide linkage.

The IP is now considered a first step in the development of a coherent and detailed future plan - one that is capable of meeting the challenges of a fast-changing environment and ever-increasing infrastructure, housing, employment and resource issues. In the meantime, the IP has been placed on the Pitcombe Parish Council (PPC) website, where one can access the original rationale for creating the IP; details of the planning and development system; the responses to the questionnaire; census data and the aims and aspirations for the parish. Evidence shows that it has been well read. It has also been summarised in the Pitcombe News.

Higher-level planning developments

Since the IP was produced the impact of recent Government legislation (Localism, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the new Planning Guidelines) has begun to take effect and planning at the levels of County and District has led to new plans. Of particular importance to this parish is the 2015 South Somerset District Council (SSDC) Local Plan.

The IP summarised the mainly relevant points of the SSDC Local Plan, which at that time was in the process of re-drafting to take on board latest Government legislation as referred to above. Much of what was stated in the Local Plan then, at least as it applies at our level, has broadly survived into the final SSDC Local Plan (Feb 2015). However, for completeness, and as a ready reference important to the understanding of implications at our level, relevant aspects of the SSDC Local Plan 2015 have been extracted into Annex A.

The intention is that Parish Plan 2015 is to take account of, and analyse, the new information and its impact and provide more robust conclusions for determining how Pitcombe parish sees its future, and how it intends to influence decisions.

Why create a new parish plan?

The Localism Act offers communities more control in the future over their areas, through either the creation of neighbourhood or parish plans. To have any properly recognized say in their future, parishes should have one of these in place. The PPC opted for the latter, which does not presuppose development, is less complicated, less costly, but can cover a broader range of issues and so is considered more appropriate for our situation.

Parish plans enable parishes to deal not only with the important issues of planning and development, but also those local issues which are unique to each parish such as traffic, enterprise, support services and internal facilities for residents. These are extremely important to the wellbeing and sustainability of parishes and therefore should receive commensurate attention in the plan.

Planning and development has, of course, become a high profile and significant matter to a rural parish and requires a more detailed explanation. It is important to point out that, whilst the NPPF principles support the Localism Act in many ways, and therefore rural communities too, a number of planning decisions, driven by the Government Departmental Planning Guidelines, have highlighted the fact that often local considerations are not adequately being recognised. A brief commentary on the seeming contradictory content of government legislation interpreted down through county and district level plans can be found at Annex B.

It is significant that the advent of this ‘no on the one hand’ and ‘yes on the other hand’ planning legislation has directly brought into focus the need for parish and market town councils to create their own plans. However, various analyses in this document show that, in reality, there is a limited amount which can be influenced at the parish level and this applies particularly to the planning process for development. But it is still considered important to at least try for what control parishes can have over decision making at their leave and it can be a means of holding the hierarchy of planners to account. To not have a community endorsed parish plan is increasingly likely, in the new context, to leave the field open to others to exploit.

Generally, therefore, this plan intends to:

- Highlight and deal with issues which impact on the daily lives of parishioners and help to secure future improvements.
- Identify ways of improving internal parish functions and assets in a way that embraces the lives of parishioners and increases their influence over future decision making.

With regard to planning and development, the main thrust of this plan is to:

- Help the parish understand the impact of new legislation, in particular ‘the presumption in favour of sustainable development’. (To quote the Government, sustainable development is about ‘change for the better’ and this mantra should be an oft quoted and used guiding principle).
- Explain that the parish at its level has few levers with which to exercise control over certain development and this particularly applies to schemes on or just outside our boundaries, or to the larger development applications being managed at the level of SSDC and above. But in accepting this fact of life, we demonstrate the increasing importance for other parishes to provide us with early information, and Pictombe Parish Council to be alert to development applications and to have a good knowledge of the new planning context.
- Show that careful consideration of the actions identified in this plan should place the parish in a better position to bring pressure to bear on given issues and applications and therefore also better able to safeguard its situation. In deploying such actions it is more likely that the parish could exert greater influence in future – especially with regard to the more questionable applications.

In any case, our rural parish should maintain an efficient capability to exercise control over its own affairs and, to a large extent, this extends to planning applications arising from within its boundaries - we show how and where this could be improved.

The Pitcombe Parish Plan Working Group

March 2015

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PARISH PLAN 2015

THE PARISH



Pitcombe is a small, attractive, rural parish embracing the three hamlets of Cole, Hadspen and Pitcombe - its boundaries are shown at Annex C. The parish lies between Castle Cary and Bruton and not far distant from Wincanton, featuring mainly farmland, orchards and open countryside. The parish is traversed by a number of footpaths as well as two rivers, the Brue and the Pitt. There are many historic buildings. The population of around 500 is divided between some 200 homes. There are two independent and one state secondary schools that serve some residents within their catchment but others rely on the outlying schools. Nearly half of the residents are economically active and approaching 20% are retired.

The parish has three light industrial businesses - a quarry, a car repair shop and a wholesale plant nursery which, together with the schools, provide some limited employment for the resident population. There are some bed & breakfast facilities, a tea room, a weddings and hospitality company and a developing tourist attraction at Hadspen House and others in adjacent parishes, notably Haynes Motor Museum and Hauser & Wirth art centre, all of which add to the attraction of the area for tourists.



The special country landscape and generally peaceful nature of the parish are important to residents, many of whom value very highly the quality of life this brings. The parish is fortunate in having an active parish church, village hall, parish magazine, Flood Action Group in Pitcombe, and social calendar, which help to provide focus and a spirit of community. However, these will need to adapt to the changing needs of residents, alongside the formal services provided by the local authority, if they are to continue to have an effective role. As well as this it is recognised that the parish cannot be totally insulated from change and must play its part in supporting the communities in the surrounding area and Somerset as a whole.

There are no shops or other amenities or services, so the residents rely on the surrounding market towns for access to these, including health related, banking, postal and emergency services. A close working relationship between the parish and the surrounding towns is therefore essential.

WHAT ARE OUR OBJECTIVES?

Following analysis done in the IP and, having reviewed that in the context of recent developments, it is deduced that the over-riding focus of the Parish Plan 2015 should be agreement to the undernoted Objectives:

- To protect the visual amenity, character and peaceful nature of the parish.
- To inform and work with residents on planning and other issues.
- To embrace sustainable change where it is proportionate and not unduly damaging.
- To respond to the future needs of residents and promote solutions.
- To work more closely and regularly particularly with adjacent town and parish councils; and with the district and county councils on matters of concern or mutual interest.
- To encourage and support community facilities and activities within the parish and, in so doing, to enhance the flow of information and create an improved community spirit for the good of all.
- To maintain a safe environment.
- To aim for a road policy that best meets the needs of residents and other users.
- To involve residents and parish businesses in the development of parish planning.

We use these Objectives through the plan as the underlying basis for our approach for the future preservation and sustainability of the parish.



PLANNING

Environmental

Environmentally friendly development has had considerable support from Government and, in general, the public has tended to be sympathetic, due to the concerns over growing population numbers, diminishing natural resources, the continued exploitation of fossil fuels and their related impact on the climate, including global warming. However, it is now the case that some such developments are having a disproportionate impact, not least on the landscape, and that there is a limit to what is appropriate, particularly in favoured development locations such as the West Country.

For example, in the case of solar farms, the Government now wants to ensure that more agricultural land is dedicated to growing crops and, in the case of wind turbines, it is concerned at the high capital cost against output and public dislike. As a result, subsidies available from Government for solar farms are being reduced to the extent that the commercial viability of some schemes will be lost and it is expected that the general presumption of approval for such schemes will become less likely.

The future of wind farms seems less clear. The current Government recognises the increased antipathy to on shore wind farms. However, the main opposition party seem to favour significant further expansion in both on and off shore wind generation.

In the local area, as well as within Pitcombe parish itself, there have been applications for solar and wind farms, as well as proposals for poly tunnels, a recycling plant and landfill sites, which, it would be claimed, fall into the environmentally friendly category. Some have been successfully resisted but others have been approved - some on appeal - because, for example, they fall within the current policy guidelines and/or help to provide local employment opportunities.

Despite the foreshadowed Government policy changes, there is little doubt that a good deal of climate-friendly development will continue to meet Government policy or generate support and exploitation. The pressure to find suitable land in a small country such as the UK will provide further incentive, so in many cases approval may well be granted, regardless of the impact on the landscape. For these reasons, and because that some high ground within the parish has been identified in the SSDC Local Plan as suitable for wind generation, it will be necessary for the parish to develop a policy response.



Parish action

Given the rural nature of the parish, the policy should be that environmentally friendly developments will only be acceptable if it can be demonstrated that the effect on the character of the parish is limited. Notwithstanding this, effort should be made to support small, sustainable, energy-efficient domestic initiatives that have little overall impact. In exceptional circumstances, support should also be given to small commercial initiatives related, for example, to tourism, if they can be implemented in a way that supports local employment without diminishing the overall attractiveness of either living in or visiting the area, or overloading the road network.

Factors that will determine whether developments are within acceptable parameters could include:



- The proximity to conservation areas and listed buildings;
- The topography of the site; the type, size and number of installations; total plot size; cumulative effect; and the impact of any associated infrastructure.
- Potential for pollution and/or contamination and increased flood risk.
- That suitable traffic management schemes are included where appropriate.
- In appropriate cases, if the development is granted approval, and especially if the impacts are outside acceptable or broadly beneficial parameters, the parish should seek the maximum contribution through the Community Infrastructure Levy or any equivalent for the benefit of enhancing parish facilities.



Housing

Housing is a very important issue for a small rural parish such as ours, which includes two conservation areas and a scenic setting, mainly containing agricultural land. The very factors that make the parish what it is mean that there will always be limited scope for new housing and restrictions on extending existing accommodation. Much of the existing housing has been present for hundreds of years but in recent times some new housing has been provided, notably along the A359 and in Cole, with the result that there are now some 220 houses.

The consultation undertaken prior to the IP indicated that the established accommodation supports the demand, as only a small minority of residents suggested that more private and social housing was needed, this was linked to affordability rather than availability. Furthermore, there are many alternatives available locally both now and proposed in Wincanton, Shepton Mallet, Ansford/Castle Cary and Bruton, including shared ownership and other more affordable housing. It is also relevant to highlight that the existing and new SSDC Plans do not designate any areas in the parish for new housing.

The question of travellers' sites was also investigated previously and it was concluded that it was extremely unlikely that a suitable location could be identified in the parish. More to the point, such a site would be inappropriate in a parish which had few amenities and no services of its own.

However, it would be wrong for the parish to be too prescriptive, in terms of small scale sustainable new or improved housing stock. The parish accepts that the nature of the resident population and newcomers, together with their needs and aspirations, are likely to change. This includes the recognition that technology and design concepts will change too. These changing requirements, within reason and provided they do not compromise the integrity of adjacent properties and the general setting, should be accommodated. This should ensure that the parish continues to provide not only for the existing residents but the next generation too and, in so doing, ensure that it remains an attractive option as a place to live.

Parish action

The above analysis means there should be limited occasions on which the parish will endorse residential development and even less so in the case of travellers' sites. At the same time, the parish recognises that there are some situations where a flexible approach would be appropriate. Examples could be:

- A sympathetic conversion of a former agricultural building.
- An increase to the size of existing accommodation to provide for a wider mix of families.
- Changes to design, materials or setting to improve sustainability and appearance; the latter being relevant particularly in the case of historic buildings/conservation areas.

Generally, with regard to housing applications, the parish policy should address the following factors:

- Is it in a conservation area?
- Do the plans improve the quality and sustainability of the housing stock?
- Adverse proximity to listed buildings.
- Impact on visual amenity and synergy with adjacent buildings.
- Scale of the development, and traffic and parking implications.



Other planning related development

There are a number of immediate and longer-term planning related issues, but particularly land use, which have the potential to have a very significant impact on the landscape within and around the Parish. The landscape, to a large extent, is determined by the contours and combs within which the Parish lies, including the agricultural land and open countryside.

The potential impact of solar and wind farms, as well as polytunnels, has already been discussed but there is a danger that land could also be exploited for other purposes which similarly could have a negative impact on the parish. It has already been said that the parish recognises that it should be open to progress and adopt a balanced approach to development but, at the same time, it must do all it can to defend against land use which might undermine that which makes the Parish what it is today. The commercial and industrial businesses currently operating in the parish are generally proportionate and fit well with the landscape and historical land usage. In addition, they provide some local employment and a livelihood for their owners, in other words sustainability, as well as contributing to the ebb and flow of life in the parish. However, certain types of land use are likely to be out of proportion to the low-key environment which prevails in Pitcombe and could ultimately destroy it.

The PPC is likely to face more difficult planning applications of this type in the future, and possibly ones which carry increased weight behind them from higher authorities. To cope with this, where there might be unwanted and harmful schemes, it may be useful for the PPC to consider whether within its membership it has sufficient planning expertise and capacity to be able to generate professional level rebuttals. If the PPC finds that it is worried about this, it should perhaps consider some internal training, or co-opting a volunteer from the parish with good knowledge of planning and the time to give, in order to assist with well thought through and timely staff work to seek alteration to, or to fend off, troublesome or unwanted applications.

In order to apply controls to land use developments perceived as detrimental to the parish we should adopt the following policy:

- Support the maintenance of existing farms, orchards and agricultural use and expansion of such whenever appropriate.
- Emphasise the importance of maintaining and encouraging small scale commercial and industrial use of land only where it fits the existing profile of the parish and does not have disproportionate impact on the landscape and the environment, does not cause pollution or flood risk or adversely affect road safety and does not overload existing infrastructure.
- Connect with and work with adjacent councils in order to assist with the selection of more appropriate locations for larger industrial or commercial proposals.
- Involve local environmental groups wherever possible and appropriate.
- Invite the PPC to review its in house level of planning expertise and capacity and, if necessary, consider co-opting a suitable volunteer, in order to be prepared to deal promptly with more the difficult planning environment likely to be faced in the future. This volunteer function should be considered along with another related volunteer function under the section 'The PPC and Coordination'.
- If necessary where seemingly unjustified planning decisions are being forced through, to be prepared to escalate representation to higher levels – including local Councillors, Planning Inspectorate, MPs and the Ombudsman.

ROADS, TRAFFIC AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Roads and traffic

The A359 and A371 are the only A roads in the parish, serving as main arteries to Castle Cary, Bruton, Wincanton and beyond to Shepton Mallet, Yeovil, Bristol and Bath. The carriageway width of both is relatively restricted, despite carrying a heavy through-traffic load, particularly lorries that currently use these roads as the only practical route between the A303 and A37, and to access the Dimmer recycling plant. The remaining roads traversing the parish are either B or unclassified roads – but used extensively by residents and commercial vans and lorries.

The level of traffic on the roads in the parish has increased significantly in recent years, in common with the rest of the country. It is particularly noteworthy that there have been a considerable number of accidents at or near the Grove Cross junction, where the A359 and A371 intersect - and yet there are no speed restrictions in the immediate lead-up to that junction. The volume of traffic is set to increase further, particularly on the A roads, with Hadspen House being developed as a tourist attraction that hopes to attract 100,000 visitors annually. This is likely to be compounded by increased visitors to the new Hauser and Wirth Art Centre at one side of the parish and the new Haynes Motor Museum in Sparkford at the other side and, more generally, as the area becomes more recognised as a venue for tourists. The newly approved solar park at Manor Farm, just outside the parish, and other pending development applications, for example, at Dimmer, Priddle's Hill and housing west of Castle Cary/Ansford, will generate even more traffic in the medium and long term and the implications of this need to be recognised. As part of this, more could be done to ensure that adequate signage is in place, as well as road markings to help enforce and reduce speeding – after resurfacing, markings are not always replaced.

Parish action – on roads and traffic.

The issues identified above cannot be solved by the parish in isolation and, for this reason, a broad policy designed to improve traffic safety is required. This should focus on speed limits and controlling traffic flow to help ensure that the changes facing the parish become a catalyst for improvements to enhance the enjoyment and safety of the area for residents and visitors alike. To achieve this, the PPC could



consider the promotion of a co-ordinated and ongoing discussion with residents, including adjoining town councils, as follows:

- A 30 mph speed limit between Ansford and Grove Cross; possibly beyond to Hadspen House.
- Feeder lanes at Grove Cross for turning right and into the new public entrance to Hadspen House.
- Renewal and re-organisation of signage at Grove Cross junction to improve safety.
- A series of safety measures on the A359 through the schools' area should be considered urgently, for example: a 20 mph speed limit as a better alternative to speed humps; permanent flashing speed-identifying signs and verge fences warning of high child/pedestrian use.
- Generally, a review of adequate road markings and signage to enforce speed limits, and reduce speeds, on roads and lanes in the parish.
- Road-mud clearance chargeable if not performed adequately by those causing it
- Changes to the A37 to accommodate larger lorries.



Public transport

At the macro level, it could be argued that the parish is well served particularly for access to London and other major conurbations having Bruton, Castle Cary and Templecombe mainline stations close by, and a limited range of county bus connections. It is also relevant that almost double the county average number of our parish residents work either exclusively or mainly from home, and yet when necessary can travel around the country relatively easily by virtue of the mainline train services and major road connections such as the A303 and A37 being close by.

At the local level, however, the county bus services operate only on the main A road routes (A359 and A371) into and out of the parish and provide access to the nearby towns of Castle Cary, Wincanton, Shepton Mallet and beyond. While the services do not reach into the minor roads in the parish, the A roads are relatively close for the majority of residents, so this of itself should not present any significant difficulties. However, previous research and anecdotal evidence suggests the service suffers from a lack of reliability and frequency, and for this reason it is used only out of necessity, many preferring to make local journeys by car, motor cycle, pedal cycle or on foot. This is borne out in part by the national census data which shows that parish household car ownership is significantly above the county average suggesting that households feel the need to use their own transport.

All the above is perhaps not surprising for a rural parish with a network of country lanes and with properties generally well spread out except around Pitcombe and Cole. Furthermore, the existing situation does not appear to be creating a groundswell of criticism, and generally residents choose transport options to suit their particular needs, with public transport, at the very least, offering a last resort when necessary. Notwithstanding, we consider that this is an area where further feedback from residents could be particularly useful. In addition, there are other factors that should be taken into account in considering public transport not least environmental impacts, for example, traffic volumes and pollution.

Parish action –on public transport.

Recognising the desirability of improving the environment and the experience of getting about the parish and to places of work outside it, the following should be considered:

- The PPC working with other nearby town councils and parishes and SSDC and SCC to deliver an improved bus service which is more complementary to other available public and private transport options;
- Parish residents being canvassed for their views on public transport through the planned consultation process on draft plan 2015, with the results used as a contribution to the above dialogue;
- Consideration of the potential for setting up and supporting transport sharing schemes, particularly at work travel times;
- Exploration of a means of support/extension of the Wini-bus project which operates out of Wincanton.

It should be noted that the administration of roads and transport, resides at County Council level, and therefore it would be appropriate for the results of local dialogue to be represented to SCC by the PPC.



PARISH FACILITIES AND CO-OPERATION.



The facilities and range of activities within the parish are very important to many of the residents in support of their enjoyment of living here and their general well-being. The parish church of St. Leonard's, the village hall and Pitcombe News are essential ingredients in this and are already making a significant contribution and helping also to create a parish identity and spirit. Both the village hall and church have active programmes of events which regularly bring together a sizeable proportion of residents and the Pitcombe News keeps people informed. The availability of these facilities is a major bonus for the parish – and are complementary to the more practical services provided by the district council through surrounding towns.

The village hall

The hall was re-built in 2006 and has modern facilities capable of accommodating 100 or more people depending on the type of event. It is run professionally by a Committee of Trustees which manages a series of events throughout the year including a summer event, plant sale, harvest supper and Christmas party. It also has regular lettings to local groups and private bookings which provide opportunities for a range of activities including physical exercise, hobbies and local gatherings. These all provide opportunities for local issues to be aired.



The Committee of Trustees has recognised that it has to move with the times but also that tradition is important to many. So, going forward, it wants to provide a diverse and interesting series of events and a venue for the widest possible range of activities. Events are well supported but the audiences have tended to be mature adults. To achieve change, recently new members have been encouraged to join the committee, and specific roles for all its members have been created to help ensure that responsibilities are shared in such a way as to not overload or expect too much from individuals. The committee also wants to encourage residents to help co-ordinate specific events but on a one-off basis rather than permanent commitment. In the last year, the hall's programme of events has been revitalised with changes to the format of traditional events, and new types of event being implemented to extend reach and interest. The new approach appears to be working with events over-subscribed, and new user groups emerging. A greater number of people across the parish now know about the hall, and what it has to offer both to individuals and the community as a whole and more residents are interested in playing their part.

More could still be done to help achieve its full potential for bringing residents together to help create greater harmony and a clearer parish identity. If this can be achieved it should have the added advantage of creating an even better environment in which information, concerns and aspirations can be shared and the interests of the whole community better co-ordinated and represented in future.

The parish church

The Church of England parish church of St. Leonard's remains important to many of the residents and like the village hall is a centre for bringing people together. The day to day running of the church is managed by a committed and active Parochial Parish Council and attendances at services is relatively high for the present day. It is also supported by a strong group of Friends, particularly active recently in a successful fund raising campaign for additional bells, and the foundation of a regular group of campanologists, which is also attracting a new and younger membership. Regular services are held and it appears to be delivering the spiritual support that its congregation needs. There are very few non-Christians in the parish, and close-by there are alternatives for non-Church of England faiths, so there does not appear to be a need to provide any alternative places of worship. The attractive nature of the building, its churchyard and immediately surrounding houses, all in a tranquil setting, add substantially to the conservation status of Pitcombe.

The Church Council, with the support of its Friends, is in the process of enhancing arrangements at the church in order both to improve its facilities for worship, but also to make it more generally useable as another community space. In addition to its modern speaker system, it is improving the heating and lighting, and installing catering and WC facilities, and removing some pews in order to open up space to accommodate events other than church services. The Church Council is alive to the fact that it could and should open itself up to making wider use of these facilities for the greater good of the parish. These improvements are very much in hand, and it is understood that during 2015 the Church will be announcing certain events which should excite the parish community to the availability of another venue for holding gatherings.

There is no direct link between the church and the hall but a reasonable proportion of residents support both. The two assets only come together at present for the harvest supper held at the hall, and proceeds from the sale of donated local produce is shared and contributes to their separate funds. This shared event demonstrates the significance of farming to the parish landscape and the support for it by residents. It also illustrates how, with the right open and forward thinking approach, the church and hall could do more jointly to help bring the parish community together. It might also provide opportunities for the church, if it wishes, to get a general message about its wider role in society across to those not directly involved with it.



The Pitcombe News

This publication which is distributed free throughout the year to all households in the parish, has a well-established following. It provides a reliable source of information about events, particularly at the hall and church, and generally about issues and developments in and around the parish, including planning applications considered by the PPC. Coupled with a range of articles of relevance and interest to residents, recipes and, for example, residents' foreign travel experiences, it makes for a pleasant and thought provoking read. Most recently it has introduced a very useful Parish Directory.

The magazine relies on a dedicated voluntary publication team and is funded by donations from the hall, the church and individual donations from residents. There is scope for the magazine to be developed further but this would require additional funds and commitment from contributors. It could become an even more important resource to be used as a means of bringing issues to the attention of the whole community rather than relying on a partially effective 'grape vine', mentioned elsewhere in this document, which tends to reach the same core of people. In this way it could, when perhaps a situation could benefit from it, kick start community inspired campaigns the help in focusing a more co-ordinated parish view. Alongside this, it may be useful if it could develop, with the acquiescence of the church and hall, an even closer partnership, with all three of them joining up in a co-operative approach aimed at improving and coordinating the experience of living in the parish. This might also assist in the commissioning of articles by local experts and others which aim to inform on issues of importance to the local community.

Parish actions

Representatives of the church, the village hall, and the Pitcombe News could be invited, perhaps by the PPC on behalf of the parish, to come together periodically, perhaps as a standing group, and perhaps with a PPC representative, to help coordinate parish events. They could also generate policy level discussion on various issues from time to time, all of which could add even more to the value and impact we already enjoy from these parish facilities.

From the above review of our parish facilities it is considered that the following ideas would meet with parish approval and should be actioned:

- The PPC, the hall, the church and the Pitcombe News considering the establishment of a Parish Coordination Group with a view to providing a forum for coordinating the parish programme of events, and possibly even generating discussion on policy level issues of interest to the parish.
- The hall encouraging ideas for new activities and events serving a broader age range, and creating even more opportunities for new volunteers to assist in organising and running events or to become involved as Trustees;
- The Pitcombe News as a key asset to the parish should be a high priority for continued fostering, both in terms of funding as well as support in kind, from all parish bodies and the parish community.



THE PPC AND CO-ORDINATION

Make up and role of the PPC

The PPC is made up of a small core of able and willing volunteers who administer the affairs of the parish and encourage input from local residents when planning and other issues affecting the parish arise.

In theory the PPC has a very wide remit and could become involved in many aspects of parish life. But, with limited resources and being reliant on unpaid volunteer councillors it has to focus on areas where it can make the most of its position, namely in responding to planning applications and practical matters such as parish upkeep, hedge cutting and verge maintenance. From its earlier consultations it appears that residents recognise that within these constraints it is doing a good job on their behalf, and that it has been very supportive when specific matters have been raised with it.

Limitations and difficulties

As can be seen from the earlier analysis of national strategies, the PPC is further limited in what it can achieve, particularly in planning and development related matters, because the majority of policy is decided at higher levels. This is exacerbated by the fact that often residents become aware too late, or not at all, of very significant development that could affect them either now or in the longer-term. For example, how many residents were aware of: the approved solar farm on Lodge Hill adjacent to Castle Cary but overlooking Pitcombe and which the Parish Council raised objections to; or the Green Energy proposal for recycling of tyres adjacent to the A359? This is partly due to the current timescales for notification of planning applications and decision making where, at either district or county level, it is often difficult to ensure that all are informed, and proper opportunity given for consultation to take place. An internal 'grape vine' does help sometimes, but is limited to known connections and in most cases mainly to those in the immediate vicinity. As a result, and due to no-one's fault, issues do not

necessarily get the community scrutiny deserved, and it is only after implementation that the full impact is understood. To help with this, thought could be given to reviewing/upgrading the council web-site and how it could be used. More thought could also be given to making additional use of the Pitcombe News and the use of interactive social sites such as Twitter or Facebook.

The difficulty is, as has been touched on already, that, with the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development', the pressures for such schemes of the sort illustrated will continue to grow and thus there is a greater need to be alert to them at the earliest of stages. Greater cohesion or connectivity between the PPC and the surrounding town councils could well help in obtaining information early. It is the towns around us which are more vulnerable to development and there have been recent examples of planning schemes in one council's area (especially alongside or near inter-council boundaries) where there is little or no coordination or visibility to the adjacent council.

Moving forward

The parish would like to create an environment in which the whole community can respond more effectively, not only on planning and development issues, but also to other challenges facing rural parishes. The aim is to help ensure that the needs of residents are delivered, that the character of the area is maintained, and that road safety and other such issues are given the attention they deserve, at a timely point in the process.

As already indicated the PPC has distinct limits to its capacity and policy reach, but it agrees that it should be more forward leaning to cope with these concerns. However, to complement this more residents could consider playing a part in support of parish matters. The parish approach should be about assisting a stretched PPC to have rather more capacity. There is a need to find, if it were possible, a more active involvement and contribution by any experienced parishioners, who may be able to give time, to assist the PPC in its efforts towards covering not only the impact of increasing amounts of legislation, but also on those occasions when complex and unwanted issues arise without much notice. Such assistance would be useful in alerting the PPC, establishing for it the nature of the issue, and communicating timely information, and even advice, to the PPC as well as to the parish. Finding such a resource may be especially useful to fill the gap between monthly PPC meetings.

Parish actions

In the section 'Other planning related development' where under the policy suggestions we invited the PPC to review its in house expertise and capacity, this section points up another but related task that the PPC could consider. Put together, these somewhat related tasks, imply that the PPC consider making an appeal for one, or preferably two parish volunteers who would be prepared to make themselves available to carry out defined co-opted tasks as follows:

- Someone to support PPC in house expertise and business capacity in this important area of alerting the council and then formulating early advice with regard to upcoming developments - especially those with short notice.
- A second person, who might assist by attending surrounding town council meetings where planning issues of mutual interest are on the agenda, which can be reported back to the PPC and parish.

The following could also be considered:

- An increased capacity, in the PPC, for closer planning co-ordination and response cohesion, using greater in house planning expertise to respond to development schemes impacting on the parish and generated within surrounding town councils, or at SSDC or County Council level.
- A summary of the agreed parish plan being distributed to all parish households.
- The PPC holding additional parish meetings during the year, separate from statutory annual and monthly PPC meetings, to inform, or update, or discuss specific matters that may be of concern to residents.
- The parish website being much more pro-active and useable than it is, perhaps with another co-opted volunteer to enhance and run it. It might also be worth considering Twitter or Facebook as an additional form of internal parish communication.
- Residents being informed in advance of the main and/or controversial issues arising (through the website/Pitcombe News/Twitter); and using the same methods of communication parishioners can be invited to raise their own issues for debate or for answers.
- Specifically for planning related matters, promoters of potential development affecting the parish either within or outside its boundaries invited to hold an open meeting to explain and debate their plans prior to formal planning applications being made.
- A wider range of issues to be reported to the Pitcombe News.
- Residents to be encouraged to use and develop the existing internal 'grape vine' to pass on details of issues that warrant consideration by all.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Background

The parish is dependent on external arrangements for police, fire and ambulance services. These are differently organised when compared with the majority of local services, as all the authorities are stand-alone entities, operating at least a step further away than County or District Councils. This is further complicated by the fact that they are all responsible though different ministries at national government level, and provide emergency services over different geographical areas: one spanning one former and one existing county council areas (Avon and Somerset Constabulary); another made up of two county councils and three Unitary Authorities (Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service); the third covering the whole south west region (SW Ambulance Service).

Although all provide local services, they do so on a strategic basis and, understandably, with different delivery standards. This inevitably makes all of them remote from the parish. It may be useful to some in the parish to understand something of higher level structures of these emergency services, and a brief commentary about them and their delivery standards is at Annex D.

Impact at parish level.

Whilst the above indicates the administrative remoteness of these services, in practical terms contacts with representation on the ground can be quite close. The police community support officer from Wincanton Station attends the PPC regularly, and we are served for fire and ambulance services from Castle Cary, with other fire and ambulance stations in surrounding market towns.

Parishioners up to now appear not to have voiced concerns regarding the support of emergency services. However, all of them are faced by either increases in demand for their services or, as austerity continues to prevail, the requirement to make reductions in expenditure. In the case of the police, we currently enjoy regular contact with our community support officer. But we do not enjoy any dialogue with either fire & rescue or ambulance services. There is a potential worry, for all three of these services, that policy decisions or indeed consultation pre-dating them, may not extend to parish level. It is important therefore that the parish is engaged with, and has some awareness of, the subject matter of emergency services, and even including their roles in disaster relief.

Parish action

The parish might consider ways in which it could establish rather closer relations with fire and ambulance services, for example, inviting fire and ambulance services to visit and provide briefing or demonstration days, perhaps at the village hall, for the PPC and parishioners. The police could be included in these sessions, which could be programmed perhaps biennially. In this way and through closer contact the parish will learn of any changes, and become more aware of gaps in the system, and thus where self-help measures, perhaps similar to neighbourhood watch, but perhaps in the area fire safety and first aid, may be appropriate.

In summary, our policy action relating to emergency services could be:

- To consider ways of obtaining increased awareness, and possible subject matter expertise through the auspices of the PPC, who could also lead the way to establish regular liaison with emergency service representatives, perhaps through a programmed series of informative briefings and demonstrations.
- Through the above action the parish may come to consider what self-help measures might improve any given gaps in cover – for example the provision of a defibrillator at the village hall.

ENTERPRISE, EMPLOYMENT AND COMMERCE

What do we have in the parish now?

In the light of the rural nature of the parish and the size of settlements within it, the existing business base is quite small. Nonetheless it is important to the community, providing as it does, services and employment not only within the parish but also further afield. Currently it consists mainly of Bruton Girls School with part of Sexey's School also extending into the Parish; a quarry; a vehicle repair business; a tearoom/restaurant, seven farms, cider orchards, the Gants Mill weddings and hospitality business, and a commercial nursery. All of these establishments are of long standing and as such are fully integrated into the community and its environment and thus should be supported. As far as the Quarry is concerned, it is unique, a respected business as the only source of Cary Stone. It is subject to the policies set out in the Somerset Minerals Plan 2015, which covers mineral development controls to ensure that impacts on local communities and the environment are mitigated to acceptable levels.

Are there opportunities for growth?

As the area is predominantly a farming area, and with these few select enterprises, we must recognise that the expansion of existing business will be minimal. That which does occur will need to do so without having a detrimental impact on the nature of the area. In this respect the impact of additional vehicle movements must also be taken in to account. As has been indicated already, without considerable improvement the roads are not suitable for a large increase in the volume of traffic - any significant additional initiatives are likely to create even more pressure on the road infrastructure. It needs to be recognised that this could present limitations in respect of new businesses.

Hadspen House and its gardens are being refurbished and in the short to medium term this development will be offering new employment as it expands into a tourist attraction and entertainments centre. It may be that this attraction gives rise to other enterprises, such as bed and breakfast operations, cafes or similar.

All of this could potentially provide some benefit to the parish, and South Somerset generally, but subject to the earlier proviso that the increased traffic is well managed.

It has been suggested that there could be opportunity for a parish based farmers market. Such an innovation, possibly using the village hall, could open up the way for some increase in small 'pop up' businesses in the parish to the benefit of sellers and buyers alike.

The overall situation of growth could also be helped by a directory of parish businesses, which in turn may assist with local employment and recruiting.



GANTS MILL



Could the parish have a policy for small scale sustainable enterprises?

The SSDC Plan 2015 does not envisage this type of development in rural areas and there are no identified brown-field sites in the parish to provide a focus for such development opportunity. Furthermore, an intent to use non-industrial land for industrial developments would most likely require change of use from agricultural or residential building purposes. The neighbouring market towns and Bruton rural centre already provide opportunity, and the necessary infrastructure, amenities and earmarked land, for businesses to start up and continue.

However, the parish could have a policy to be open to beneficial, sustainable development, while maintaining the over-riding consideration that the following requirements should form part of any planning approval:

- Sensitive positioning.
- Appropriate types and scale of enterprise.
- The use of premises of a character which will ensure that the environment is protected and local infrastructure not overloaded.

Realistically, this points to cottage industry rather than anything more substantial, as well as support for some level of appropriate organic growth of the existing sustainable enterprises already present in the parish.

Parish action

In the light of the above important issues for business in the parish, the following could be considered:

- The parish supporting the maintenance, and expansion where appropriate, of the existing commercial activities.
- In considering any new enterprise or commercially based development proposals, the PPC as policy (addressed under the section 'Other planning related development') to encourage small scale commercial and industrial use of land provided that protection of the existing environment be the principal determinant.
- The PPC consulting existing parish businesses, to explore issues of importance to them.
- Home workers be invited to get together to comment on the efficacy and efficiency of existing broadband internet provision and coverage of mobile phone providers, with a view to the PPC considering what representations should be made on their behalf.
- The PPC to explore the opportunities to engage with BT Openreach with a view to pursuing communications improvements.

Improved communications

Parish businesses do suffer from inadequate and unreliable internet connectivity, and arguably should at the very least reach national targets as soon as possible. In respect of Fibre Optic Broadband, BT Openreach have a nationwide roll-out programme. As the parish touches upon the two towns, Castle Cary and Bruton, it may be that one end of the Parish is 'switched on' before the other, due to the location of the telephone exchanges. However, both these centres are at present classified by BT Openreach as falling under the non-specific '**Exploring Solutions**' category. This states that; 'We're keen to bring Superfast Fibre to your area and are exploring how best to achieve that. We may deliver it as part of our commercial programme, or by working in partnership with your local authority. At the moment you can't order Superfast Fibre.'

The next step up from this is a 'Planned Area' delivering Fibre Optic broadband within 18 months. But a realistic view is that it is unlikely that fibre optic broadband will be available anywhere in the Pitcombe parish area within the next two years. There is however, an implied potential to vary this through suitable representations and innovation. The PPC could take this forward as a voice on behalf of the community, in conjunction with our surrounding towns, keeping the parish up to date with the situation.

FLOOD PROTECTION

The parish has two Flood Zones within it, one concerning the River Brue, which has flood control stemming from the retention dam constructed up river of Bruton, and which was substantially improved in 2013. The other Flood Zone is that of the River Pitt, the Zone of which extends from up river of Pitcombe, through Pitcombe and Cole until joining the River Brue. The River Pitt has no flood control and is not considered a large enough river to come under the Environment Agency for funding. The two Flood Zones are shown on the Map at Annex E.

The parish suffers minor flooding from run off and drain blocking, especially during the winter months. The handling of this on a routine basis is done through the PPC.

The flood protection to Pitcombe is however an ongoing issue of concern. Pitcombe has had a history of flooding which was most recently evident following a rainstorm in December 2008 when 10 properties were badly damaged. Consequently, a Flood Action Group of volunteers from Pitcombe and Cole was created, and through this, and a mix of self-help donations and a grant from the County, a number of improvements to the flow of the River Pitt have been carried out. The Flood Action Group is active and annually leads a number of volunteers to conduct river clearance days. These actions, together with individual protection measures to properties at risk, have since 2008 kept the situation under control.

That said the current level of improvement has not been tested by a rainfall equivalent to that of December 2008. Therefore the Flood Action Group still has the concern that the current measures taken could well be overwhelmed in the event of another severe flood. The Group is of a view (in the light of warnings that global warming continues to forecast greater numbers and scale of flood events), that the level of protection needed will not be resolved until a balancing lake, up river of Pitcombe, is constructed. The Flood Action Group, supported by the PPC, has so far not attracted sufficient priority from the Environment Agency or SCC to achieve this, though there are some signs that SSDC is taking more interest. Furthermore, the Government, seemingly, is taking the issue of flood protection more seriously and is, accordingly, delivering more funding to Councils to improve protection measures – this could be tested.

Parish action

- Given the above, the Flood Action Group, with support of the PPC, continues with its efforts to attract the attention of SCC and the Environment Agency regarding the balancing lake and perhaps with the support of SSDC if they are prepared to become involved.

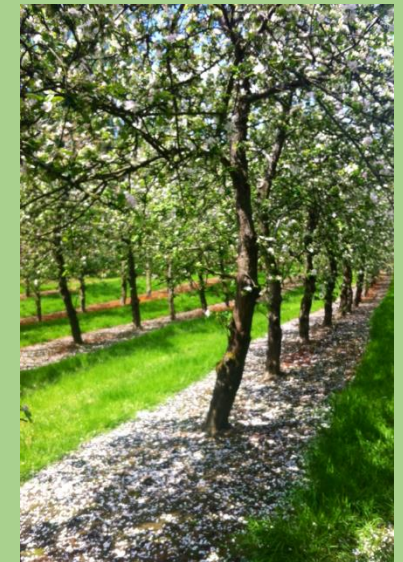


THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Pitcombe is a peaceful, rural parish, consisting of one of the last unspoilt combes of Somerset and supporting cider apple orchards, 7 farms of pasture and arable land. The rivers Brue and Pitt run through it, along with subsidiary streams. There are conservation areas in Hadspen and Pitcombe and more than 20 Grade II listed houses, with Hadspen House, Godminster Manor and Honeywick being Grade II*. The majority of the 200 or so dwellings are more than 100 years old and the historic nature of our settlements and rural buildings contributes to the overall beauty of the parish. Connecting Pitcombe, Cole and Hadspen and crossing the farmland that makes up most of the parish landmass, is a network of paths and green lanes, including signed trails, permitted footpaths and bridleways and other routes with public access, all of which are maintained by those whose land they traverse. Most of these are shown on the Parish Boundary map at Annex C.

There is a continuing issue with fly tipping on the green lanes, which, by their very peaceful nature, provide an ideal opportunity for rogue builders and others to dump their detritus. Although the district council regularly posts notices, with little means to police the lanes, it remains a problem. Parishioners should be encouraged to report any sightings of suspicious vehicles or new fly tipping. On summer weekends, scramble bikers (often unlicensed) on the green lanes can be disturbing, not only in terms of noise but as a danger to cross country cyclists and walkers. In times past there have also been travellers' camps on the green lanes, which have caused problems in terms of rubbish and aggressive dogs.

Among the footpaths are two of national importance, which converge in the parish: the Macmillan Way and the Leland Trail. These run from Wyke Lane, through Cole and along the top of the valley opposite Hadspen, before heading into Castle Cary via Solomon's Lane. We also share the parish with a large variety of wildlife, including deer, kingfishers, otters, owls, woodpeckers, bats and badgers, for which considerations such as noise and light pollution, or disturbance of habitats should be taken into account.





With regard to the above parish aims should be to:

- Preserve the natural beauty and peaceful nature of the parish.
- Ensure that roads and rights of way are maintained in order to be fully accessible, safe and un-littered.
- Take into account the historic nature of the settlements, whether they are conservation areas or not.
- Maintain the habitats and diversity of wildlife living alongside us.
- Ensure that there is as little pollution as possible – whether it is light, sound or actual material and everyone should feel able to report incidents.

Parish action

To achieve the above aims the following could be considered:

- Keep up the programme of hedge and verge cutting.
- Ensure, when considering planning issues, that the views from footpaths, especially the Leland Trail and Macmillan Way, are as unspoilt as possible.
- Encourage, with positive campaigns, parishioners to report fly tipping and mud on the roads to the district council (publicising contact details to make this easier) and to collect litter when they see it.
- Institute annual parish action days - such as a clean-up day.

SUMMARISING OUR KEY STRATEGIC POLICIES

What has been written above sets out all of the matters which have been identified, and the detailed actions suggested to address them. Although these actions present a demanding agenda, they seek to capture all of the issues which are affecting and will continue to challenge the community, and so due consideration of them is needed either in the short or medium term. The priority and the timescale to be applied to the individual action points should be determined. Following a consultation process and support by the parish, the PPC should become the guardian and owner of this plan. They should take responsibility for measuring progress, perhaps annually, setting new priorities as progress is achieved.

In summary, listed below are the crucial strategic policies which, in embracing our Objectives on page 3, set the direction of the overall plan now in 2015:

Planning and development: The greatest challenge facing the parish for the future is that brought about by planning and development. In order to respond to this it is necessary to ensure that our first Objective ‘To protect the visual amenity, character and peaceful nature of the parish’, so highly valued by the community, is carried forward into the PPCs policies and working practice in dealing with planning and development applications. This could mean that development should be strongly resisted, with the only exceptions being where they are truly sustainable and support local life and the expansion of existing businesses.

The threat from traffic: We should safeguard the environment and the community against the growth in traffic on already overloaded local roads.

Bringing together parish assets: The church, the village hall and the Pitcombe News should be encouraged to enhance the service they provide to the community by developing a coordinated approach to promulgating information and promoting activities to bring together the community and foster common objectives.

The democratic process: In order to carry forward the will of the community it will be most important to put every effort into improving the connection between the community and their representatives, initially through the PPC and then through the SSDC. Not least in this will be fostering and supporting the growing spirit of community which will help in supporting the PPC.

Cooperation with neighbours: The limitations on the parish, which come about because of its size, require that it engage much more with surrounding councils both to strengthen our own standing but also to support them in common objectives.

Communications: Initiatives to improve both telephone and broadband services are essential to our community to ensure that those who live or work within it are not disadvantaged.

Flood risk: The potential for local flooding remains, and continued efforts should be made to achieve greater engagement by the responsible authorities with the aim of improving the flood defence infrastructure.

Protecting the environment: The natural environment is essential to the attractive nature of the parish and this and its wildlife should be vigorously protected.

ANNEX A

THE SSDC LOCAL PLAN 2015. AN EXTRACT OF MAIN POINTS RELEVANT TO RURAL PITCOMBE.

A Profile of South Somerset (SS)

A population of 161,300 people, within 370 sq. miles. Largely rural in nature, with a population density of 1.7 people per hectare, less than half the National average. Yeovil has about a quarter of SS population – 44,000. Over 40% of SS population live in settlements of less than 2,500 residents.

The number of jobs in the District has risen from 47,500 in 1991 to 66,600 in 2011. The rate of job creation is slightly below national average, but failing businesses are also less than the national average. Yeovil is the major employer with 31,200 employees.

Rural employment

The District's Market Towns and Rural Centres act as important focal points for local employment and services. Each Market Town and Rural Centre has unique characteristics and each offers opportunities to build on their role as service and employment centres for their surrounding rural areas. With increasing technology now available many people are able to work from home, and Somerset is one of the locations which will benefit from the roll out of super-fast broadband during 2015 for 85% of homes and businesses in mainly rural parts of the County.

The landscape is mainly undulating agricultural land famed for top quality food production. Agriculture has also helped to secure special status landscapes and tourism is also an important employment sector connected as it is to a number of heritage sites in the District.

Housing

SS has about 69,500 dwellings, of which 85% are privately owned. More recent development is designed to raise design standards, but there is an intent to improve architectural quality. Affordability is a District issue, with average house

prices being over 5 times the average salary, which makes it difficult for first time buyers, particularly in rural areas. Homelessness is rising.

There is a need to find accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Show people, for both transit and permanent sites. There are policy guidelines for such accommodation specifying such matters as avoidance of adverse impacts on landscape, character of the area and on amenities and health and safety.

Transport and accessibility

Coverage of public transport is poor, and with an infrequent service, adversely affects access to facilities, particularly for the aged, young parents and children, for all but the largest communities. There is thus a heavy reliance on cars where parking is a major issue in a number of Market Towns and Rural Centres, and whilst the SSDC infrastructure plan identifies a number of road improvements, the general situation is a challenge to more carbon friendly means of travel.

Health, well being

The District is generally known as having a population with generally better health than the England average, although some living in rural areas suffer from barriers to housing, services including GP surgeries, and schools. Crime levels in SS are lower than Regional and National levels.

THE SSDC LOCAL PLAN – OBJECTIVES, SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY AND FOCUS FOR DEVELOPMENT

SSDC strategic objectives

For the period to 2028, extracts from the 9 Objectives are:

- Safe, resilient, socially just, inclusive and sustainable communities providing employment, homes and services in close proximity –
- A health enhancing environment promoting walking, cycling and non-car based transport ---
- Access to quality services and facilities designed round the needs of the community –
- An integrated sustainable transport system ---- and promoting advanced delivery of services to rural areas through information and computer technologies.
- A comprehensive, high performing economy that is diverse, adaptable and provides jobs and growth and inward investment ----- also to Market Towns and a diversified rural economy.
- A natural and built environment to attract and retain visitors, a vibrant tourism industry ---
- A balanced housing market with a range of both general and affordable housing to meet required growth and sited and built to support sustainable lifestyles with low carbon emissions, delivered through a sustainable District settlement strategy and hierarchy.
- Address climate change through both mitigation and adaptation and move towards a low carbon neutral economy ---
- Protection and enhancement of our natural environment, historic environment and biodiversity, retaining the distinctiveness of settlements and reflecting known environmental constraints, including flood risks in locating growth.

Settlement hierarchy structure and development

South Somerset and Yeovil

The Secretary of State's proposals for SS identified requirements for development delivery to 2028: 21,670 new homes: the bulk of these to be in Yeovil, with 8,300 elsewhere in the District. In terms of jobs, there should be 10,700, with the bulk of these, 9,100, in the Yeovil travel to work area.

Yeovil is strategically significant and is the focal point for economic and development activity in SS, and so outside Yeovil there is to be more limited growth and development, which is identified within the Market Towns and Rural Centres. Across SS the various towns are grouped into a settlement hierarchy of Primary Market Towns, Local Market Towns and Rural Centres. All other settlements would be considered to be within the local countryside and termed Rural Settlements.

The hierarchy below Yeovil

The hierarchy below the strategic importance of Yeovil is as follows:

- Market Towns, are the next level down for development, where provision will be made for housing, employment, shopping and other services and which will increase their self-containment and their roles as service centres for surrounding communities are either Primary Market Towns, of which Wincanton is our nearest, or Local Market Towns, which includes Ansford/Castle Cary.
- Then there are the Rural Centres, another level down, and therefore less development liability sufficient to the scale of their settlement size and services to their surrounding area, and this includes Bruton.
- Rural Settlements form the lowest rung in the ladder, and are considered part of the countryside to which countryside protection policies apply, and this includes Pitcombe Parish.

What is happening in the nearby Towns – what is their focus for development?

Development is focused at the most sustainable locations, and the Local Plan has identified the following levels of sustainable growth for the period 2006 to 2028 for these Towns/Rural Settlement upon which Pitcombe Parish depends:

Wincanton. (Primary Market Town)

- Population 4,978 and 4th largest settlement in SS. Includes a range of business and retail outlets, and provides a number of services including a doctors surgery, a hospital, leisure centre, race course, a library, banks and primary and secondary schools. Public transport links to the main towns of Yeovil, Gillingham and Taunton are good, and the Town is very well served by road links and particularly the A303, which is now likely to be dual carriageway.
- 703 new houses to be built in the period. 698 either already with planning permission or built.
- To provide for 599 new jobs in the period, requiring 8.61 hectares of land. 366 jobs and 5 hectares land already provided.
- Direction of growth – to the SW of the Town.
- Aspirations. In the period the Town aims to achieve full employment and thriving businesses, to have interesting shops in a bustling High Street in a vibrant market town, which is hub for visitors, and to have a diverse range of housing to meet local needs and sympathetic to its heritage.

Ansford/Castle Cary. (Local Market Town)

- Population 3,421. Its comparative isolation in largely rural surroundings means that the Town serves a more strategic service than expected. These services include a secondary school, doctors surgery, pharmacy, dentist, library, banks, post office and thriving high street shopping, and there is an excellent rail link at Castle Cary Station on the main line to London, although bus links are less good.
- 374 new houses are required in the period, with 156 planned or built so far.
- To provide for 273 new jobs, with 167 already provided. Another 3 hectares of employment land to be found.
- Direction of growth – to the NW of the Town.

- Aspirations. The Town's Community Plan identifies the need for better facilities for young people, better traffic flow through the Town and improved parking, affordable housing for young families, only small scale industrial, business and retail development thus maintaining the quality of the local environment. A road link to support the small scale of industrial development is foreseen as a link between Station Road and Torbay Road

Bruton. (Rural Centre)

- Population 2,974. Two main industries are farming and education, the latter being 4 schools. The Town has a number of independent shops, a doctors surgery, small library, post office, almshouses for the needy in the area and transport facilities are provided by a regular bus service and a railway station on the Bristol/Weymouth line. The new Hauser and Worth Art Centre has provided a substantial visitor attraction and some additional employment.
- 203 new houses are required in the period with 103 already committed. Development plans for the remaining 100 seem to indicate a direction on the North side of the Town along the Frome Road.
- Without a particular target for jobs, nonetheless 2.56 hectares of additional employment land are to be found over the period of which .56 hectares are already committed.
- A key environment issue is the risk of flooding along the River Brue, and its tributary the Combe Brook. Following severe flooding in 1982 a retention dam was built upstream of the Town, and this dam was further developed in 2013.
- Aspirations. Town planning is being developed in 'Bruton the Way Forward'. At the moment this recognises the need to balance the undoubted heritage assets whilst adapting to modern needs, and in doing so controlling the impact. There is a need to manage the flow of vehicles through the Town and also alleviate the parking problem in the main part of the Town. A new and enlarged doctors surgery is planned to be built on the Frome Road.

Infrastructure delivery and Community Infrastructure Levies (CIL)

The growth identified in the Local Plan, including that which is identified above, needs to be supported by infrastructure, community facilities and services to ensure future sustainability. Planning obligations in this area are currently delivered through Section 106 Agreements between local authorities and applicants. But recently the Government has introduced new legislation establishing Community Infrastructure Levies (CIL). The CIL system is adopted in the Local Plan, and SSDC sees this as being a process which will assist the provision of infrastructure delivery, especially with improved timescales.

THE RURAL SETTLEMENTS - WHAT DOES THE LOCAL PLAN SAY ABOUT THESE?

Development policy

The SS policy for developments in Rural settlements starts from the premise of no development unless certain conditions are met, the evidence for development being of a strong sustainable nature is particularly important to provide. The local community is considered best placed to determine local need and what will make their settlement more sustainable, and there will be an expectation that those proposals have either come from the local community, or have been tested and checked through local consultation and engagement.

There may be occasions when a nearby settlement may make a case for development in one settlement which could meet the needs of another or other settlements, e.g. a cluster of settlements. But in such cases clear evidence of the functional service relationship between the settlements will be needed.

Sustainable growth

With regard to economic growth, the NPPF states that policies should support sustainable economic growth in rural areas where it provides the most sustainable option in villages or other locations remote from local centres; an example is that of starter units to support a small company or workshop. New employment land in the countryside should be of a scale that is appropriate to the surrounding area. Policies apply to applications for farm diversification which amongst other regulations will not be allowed to proceed without evidence that they form part of a comprehensive farm diversification scheme, and that there would be no adverse

impacts to the integrity of any wildlife sites and landscape designations. With regard to expansion of existing businesses in the countryside then the following will have to be shown before permission can be given:

- The existing business must have shown viability over a minimum of 3 years.
- That the proposal is demonstrably needed in the location and is of appropriate scale to the location.
- That firstly land is used within the curtilage of the development, and if outside it only where it is demonstrated that additional land is essential to the needs of the business.
- There is no adverse impact on the countryside with regard to scale, character and appearance of new buildings and/or changes of use of the land.
- There is no adverse impact upon designations for wildlife or conservation.
- That the expected nature and volume of traffic generated would not have a detrimental impact.

Housing policy

With regard to housing, the NPPF states that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. But the argument that extra housing will support services is not considered tenable – there is substantial evidence that in the last 30 years that housing growth in rural areas has been accompanied by a steady decline in rural services. Small infill development will not be considered sustainable; however should it meet local need either for affordable housing, low cost market housing or a different form of housing in limited supply for locals, e.g. a small bungalow to enable elderly to move into a village, or for a young household, then such housing may be considered more sustainable.

Summary of overall policy for development in rural settlements

The Local Plan overall policy for development in Rural Settlements is summarised as follows:

- Development in Rural settlements will be strictly controlled and limited to that which: provides employment opportunities appropriate to the scale of the settlement, and/or creates or enhances community facilities and services to serve the settlement, and/or meets identified housing need, particularly for affordable housing.
- Development will be permitted where it is commensurate with the scale and character of the settlement, provides for one or more of the types of development above, and increases the sustainability of the settlement in general. Proposals should be consistent with relevant community led plans, and should generally have the support of the local community following robust engagement and consultation. Proposals for housing development should only be permitted that have access to key services.

TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY.

The Local Plan is conscious of the need to improve the situation regarding travel and accessibility. SS suffers from being a rural district with diverse patterns of transport and its consequent reliance on the car, which it sees will remain an essential mode of travel.

The Plan identifies a series of measures, and with an intent to earmark funding, to alleviate the situation. Measures will include:

- Road improvements and alleviating congestion and parking.
- The improvement of cycle and walkways.
- Supporting and encouraging home working, with significant delivery of improved broadband in 2015.
- Improving public transport connections and working with Market Towns to achieve this. Addressing matters such as reviewing bus routes to make them more responsive to demand, new routes, stops, bus shelters and improved timetabling.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY POLICIES.

The climate change situation

The Local Plan addresses the impacts of climate change in line with Government policies. Carbon Dioxide emissions per person in SS are slightly lower (7.2 tonnes per person against 8.3 tonnes per person) than the County average. By the 2050s, in spite of the actions in train and to be activated in line with Government policies, SSDC anticipates that the weather impacts in SS will be more extreme: summers and winters being 2 to 3 degrees C warmer, with summers being 20-40% drier, and winters being 10-20% wetter.

Renewables policies

Government policies strongly support renewable and low carbon energy and provide financial incentives with 'feed in tariffs' for its generation of power by solar panels and wind turbines. The Local Plan supports this delivery, though acknowledges that in some cases there will be unacceptable impacts precluding installations.

Wind Turbines: The Local Plan has a map depicting areas where wind turbines may be suitable or unsuitable, and a few locations within Pitcombe Parish fall within this map on the basis of wind speeds at least of 6.5 metres per second at 40m above ground level (the minimum economic wind speed). But along with various constraints such as conservation areas, SSSIs etc. there are further issues to be considered before development – these are such matters as practical access, landowner willingness, political will, and economic distance to the nearest grid connection.

Other renewable sources: With regard to other renewable resources SS has good potential for solar panels with its high levels of sunshine hours. There are also opportunities for small hydro-power and biomass boilers.

New development: Has the potential to reduce CO² emissions. The Local Plan sees the importance of setting high standards of sustainable construction, and national policy construction standards are such that all new homes will be zero carbon from 2016 and non-domestic buildings by 2019.

Policy measures regarding climate change

The Local Plan sets the following policies for climate change measures in SS:

- New development will ensure that CO2 emissions are minimised through energy efficient measures, sustainable construction standards and renewable and low carbon energy. It will be directed away from flood risk areas.
- Development of renewable and low carbon energy generation will be encouraged providing there are no significant adverse impacts upon residential and visual amenity, landscape character, designated heritage assets and biodiversity.
- Developers must demonstrate that proposed wind turbines do not pose a risk to bats and migratory birds.

Flood Risk: This will be an ongoing issue in SS and the SSDC has a Strategic Flood Risk assessment process where the need for action is prioritised both for flood zones and surface water/run off problems.

ANNEX B

THE STRATEGIC LEVEL OF PLANNING POLICY

LOCALISM ACT

The Act is intended to give local people a greater say in shaping the future development of their area but, importantly, the concept of “localism” is not allowed to over-ride the strategic national requirements set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK (NPPF)

The NPPF guiding principles can be summarised as follows:

- Plan-led, with local people able to shape their surroundings
- A creative exercise, finding ways to improve places where people live
- Proactive and supporting sustainable economic development [homes, businesses, infrastructure] and thriving local places
- Seeking good standards of amenities for existing and future occupants of land and buildings;
- To take account of the differing character of areas, recognise the beauty of the countryside and support rural communities
- To support the transition to a low-carbon future, taking account of flood risk and encourage the use of renewable resources
- To contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution
- Encouraging the use of land that has been previously developed [brownfield]
- To promote mixed development and multiple benefits from use of land in urban and rural areas for such functions as recreation, supporting wildlife, flood-risk mitigation, carbon storage or food production
- Conserving heritage assets for the enjoyment of future generations
- To manage patterns of growth to maximise use of public transport, walking and cycling and focus development in locations that can be made sustainable

- Supporting local strategies for health and social and cultural wellbeing and delivering community and cultural facilities, and services to meet local needs.

DEPARTMENTAL POLICY GUIDELINES

The NPPF principles are welcome and provide opportunities through Local Plans and Parish Plans to help create improved community living. However, in respect of planning development, the situation is not so positive because underneath them is a series of Departmental Policy Guidelines that say what are and are not legitimate reasons for planning refusals (see below). The result is that local views can often be over-ridden.

The NPPGs point to applications being approved, unless there is a sound evidential case against them. Furthermore, planning inspectors are required to follow the guidelines in decision making; where district councils lose more than 40% of appeal cases, the Planning Inspectorate will subsume the council's planning role.

Grounds for objection that can result in refusal of planning permission

- design and appearance
- impact on visual amenity/ landscape
- impact on a conservation area/ listed building
- overlooking and loss of privacy
- being at risk to flooding or putting endangered species at risk

Frequent concerns that are not reasons for refusal

- local preferences
- impact of the building or ground works, such as a loss of view
- reduction in housing values
- noise, mud, dust or disruption during works
- possible planning breaches
- doubts about the ownership of the land
- the application is retrospective

The Planning structure – from district to national level

Each district authority should produce a Local Plan setting out strategic issues for their local areas. These local plans have to be consistent with higher level plans at county and regional levels, and reflect and interpret the policies of the NPPF and DPPG's.

At county level, planning deals with transport, minerals and waste. Most other planning matters are dealt with at district level, and through their planning officers, who decide on most planning cases. Some larger and more controversial developments are often decided in the district planning committee, which is informed by the planning officer's recommendation.

All planning is overseen by the Planning Inspectorate, which is an arm of the Department of Communities and Local Government. The Planning Inspectorate decides on most planning and enforcement appeals.

At the community level, parishes have the opportunity through their parish councils to input in to the planning hierarchy their points about the various services and infrastructure issues affecting their specific area. In the case of the parish, the Local Plan applying to us is produced by South Somerset District Council, which covers the period 2006-2028 and was adopted on 5th March 2015.

ANNEX C – PARISH BOUNDARY MAP



ANNEX D

EMERGENCY SERVICES – OUTLINE BRIEF

BRIEFING

This is a brief commentary on the emergency services of police, fire and rescue and ambulance. It covers their HQ structures and their service delivery standards.

AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY.

The headquarters is in Portishead, which is the main control centre for the force but, for Somerset, a separate centre is provided in Taunton. As far as local Police stations are concerned, our parish falls in the Wincanton Police Station area where our support is organised by the Wincanton Rural North Team, which comprises a sergeant, a police constable and two community support officers. The community support officer for our area frequently attends the parish council meeting to provide feedback on local trends and police activity.

Police operations are managed on a force-wide basis, with resources being deployed in response to incidents and emergencies in proportion to the reported need; or standing procedures, dependant on overall capability in the light of the demands upon the service at the time. There are no published service delivery standards or expectations in respect of responses for that reason.

The Force publishes local policing plans and reports on them annually; the report that is applicable to the parish being the South East Somerset Policing Plan.

DEVON AND SOMERSET FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

The headquarters of this service is at Clyst St George, near Exeter. Of significance to our parish, there are fire stations in Castle Cary, Shepton Mallet, Frome, Wincanton and Yeovil. There are no national standards required by Government. Instead, they delegate this locally, subject to targets being set on the basis of risk assessment. The fire authority has set an overall service delivery target of an attendance to be made to property fires in 10 minutes.

In the case of our parish and many other parts of rural Somerset, the actual attendance is projected to be 10-15 minutes. This is because, of the above fire stations, only Yeovil is continuously crewed, with the others working to the “retained” duty system, whereby volunteers who live and work within the communities are on standby for call outs, and have to get to the station to crew the fire appliances and then respond to the call.

There are difficulties in maintaining sufficient numbers of public-spirited volunteers to work on the retained-duty system but we are fortunate in that our local stations provide better than average availability throughout the year.

As a policy consideration, we need to recognise our dependence on these volunteers, since the principal reason for closure of these stations in the rural community is lack of crew members. One of the features that provides that support is the goodwill of employers in releasing staff who live in the area of fire stations, so that they can respond to calls; this being particularly important during normal working hours. We might engage the further support of our neighbour parishes through their understanding of this issue into the future.

SOUTH WESTERN AMBULANCE SERVICE

This large organisation, managed as a National Health Service Trust, provides its services over the south west peninsular. This includes Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and the area formerly known as Avon. The headquarters of this service is in Exeter. It has three control centres.

Our nearest ambulance station is at Castle Cary, with further stations in Shepton Mallet, Frome and Yeovil. The emergency ambulance service performs to set national response standards; these require the attendance of an emergency ambulance in eight minutes on 75% of occasions to deal with life-threatening circumstances. Where an ambulance is called for transport of a life-threatened casualty it must be in attendance within 19 minutes on 95% of occasions. There are less demanding response targets for non life-threatening emergency incidents.

The South Western Ambulance Service finds these targets challenging as a result of the large predominately rural area it serves, and the higher than average proportion of elderly residents. Information on the achievement of targets for our area is not immediately available, but notwithstanding this, the maintenance of the Castle Cary station and crew is of importance to our parish.

ANNEX E – CONSERVATION AREA & FLOOD ZONES

