

BOB's view of the Bleadon Action Group following a resident's email on 10 November 2017

Short response

Resident: "*The Action Group has been set up to focus on opposing the potential development.*"

BOB: The Bleadon Action Group existed before it organised the public village hall meeting in September and is not only concerned with the Bridge/Bleadon Road fields. This was confirmed at the first School/250 houses Action Group meeting (see 5 Oct 17 BAG email). A Neighbourhood Development Plan will have a fundamental effect on all submitted applications, Bleadon's environment and BPC finances/precept. Given the history of our adopted Parish Plan, there needs to be clear, open and accurate communication from BPC with the community.

Resident: "*The Action Group should not dwell on any pre-existing issues affecting BPC. and individuals with differing views*"

BOB: Very few of the current BPC councillors are elected or have lived long in Bleadon, yet historic prejudice against alternative views and public scrutiny by residents persists, why is that? If a common stronger community is wanted, why the lack of information and the closed undocumented and unpublished BPC meetings, working with just a few residents e.g. the Management Working Group and NP Steering Group that influences BPC decision making? This is why residents raise their concerns and views, whether through BOB and/or the Bleadon Action Group, and request access to information for **all residents**. So, in our opinion it is important that the Action Group is fully informed of all potentially related issues.

Resident: "*If we work together, we will be a stronger voice, not a divided community*".

BOB: We/residents/BOB agree, and BPC was supposed to be working with the community, as documented in the adopted 2009-29 Parish Plan. In Apr 17 BPC unilaterally declared the plan and associated resident views 'obsolete' (which it is not according to the 2017 Good Councillor Guide and CPRE). In May 17 BPC declared it would issue its own 'vision statement', but it has not yet done so. In the meantime BPC has stated 'no objection' to development affecting green field sites, PROWs, and a SNCI contrary to the original plan. BPC restricts access to information (e.g. NDP) and hence restricts the community's ability to be engaged and be involved in the decision making processes that affect them. Interaction is made even more difficult if residents are called vexatious for asking BPC to be more open, honest and transparent and to make information more timely, accurate and accessible to all residents. We/BOB/residents therefore find it difficult to see how BPC is working together with the **whole community** if they will not respond to BOB/residents until Feb 2018!

A more detailed response follows but, as we have often said to BPC, emails/written rather than spoken words can be open to misinterpretation, but it is good to share views to help make things positively happen in the community.

More detailed response

Our apologies, but this may be another example of how a simple email regarding BPC leads to lengthy correspondence. For all of you that are up to speed with the Action Group's fuller discussions you may want to stop reading at this point.

With regards to the focus of the Bleadon Action Group (BAG). There are now two inter-related groups within the Bleadon Action Group. The Action Group existed before the village hall meeting on 26 Sept 17, and it was BAG that called that resident meeting. So, currently, the larger BAG group meetings first focus on the Bridge Rd/School/250 houses application, with a smaller group then discussing all applications and related issues that affect them; people are welcome to be in either or both groups.

With regards "individuals with differing views". BOB is known to represent residents who feel their views are not being heard. We/BOB were publicly asked and encouraged by residents to join the BAG at the village hall meeting in September, where I openly and transparently stated that BPC have issues with BOB (mainly over our requests for public access to information). I also stated that I (including other residents) have concerns over the Neighbourhood Development Plan (in part due to a lack of explanation from BPC as to why Bleadon needs one, and the true costs and liabilities involved in creating, maintaining and legally defending it). BPC's lack of openness and transparency in its actions and decision making is especially concerning following the Parish Plan public engagement process and its subsequent lack of use.

With regards "The Action Group should not dwell on any pre-existing issues affecting BPC". BAG is aware that any decision that BPC makes, or does not make, will affect all applications submitted by developers in Bleadon. That includes BPC's responses to North Somerset regarding individual applications, NSC policies including the Core Strategy/Local Plan and its potentially related Neighbourhood Development Plan (if approved by residents at a referendum). As Cllr Chinn wrote in the Summer 2017 BPC newsletter regarding objections to planning development:

- "Views should concentrate on specific planning objections as these are taken into consideration over and above personal views." . Also
- "Settlement boundaries, village plans and even some new neighbourhood plans have been shown to be irrelevant or at best to hold very little weight in current national planning decisions." (Does this mean Cllr Chinn has reservations/is for or against a Neighbourhood Development Plan? Hard to tell with no public information on decision making from our councillor representatives)

So, it is only logical and right that residents, including Action Group members, have concerns over the lack of information coming out of BPC; especially regarding the Neighbourhood Development Plan considering its potential future effects on our environment and associated costs that may increase the resident taxes/precept.

Focussing specifically on the School/250 houses. To date BPC's public statements to NSC, developers and residents include "*In villages with a school there is a much stronger sense of community*" and "*The lack of local school places is a concern which will be highlighted to the hearing*". NSC's Core Strategy (Local Plan), against which applications are evaluated, and which BPC were presumably consulted during its development, designated one of the four fields as "*Strategic Open Space*" and indicated it as "*Suitable for a Primary School if ever needed in the Village*". Residents are now faced with a developers' proposal for a school and 250 houses. The NSC designation is in the process of being removed, potentially leaving all four fields outside the settlement boundary without any specific designation, and therefore supposedly similar in status to the Purn Caravan and Celtic Way sites, i.e. green fields that BPC have publicly stated they have '*no objection*' to building on.

These public BPC statements, including its attitude to its own and NSC policies, its contrary view of Bleadon's Parish Plan and green fields, are publicly available to developers to use in their applications and/or appeals (e.g via NSC website). In our/residents view BPC's approach does not look very supportive of the original plan, especially with no public statements or information regarding the Future of Bleadon (Dec 16), Vision statement (May 17), NDP (Sept 17), etc. What is BPC's view of building on green fields, the supposed need for a school somewhere in Bleadon, etc. that can be used to object to any future submitted application? (NB These topics and associated residents views were part of the Parish Plan).

With regards the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) it is a major undertaking involving significant time and financial resources, potentially running into the tens of thousands of pounds or more for its 5-20 year existence, to be paid for by Bleadon residents. It will also affect all future submitted applications in Bleadon. We/residents would therefore have expected to receive information and at least one public meeting before BPC made the decision to have a NDP, i.e. a more consultative approach like that of the Parish Plan process would be expected. Now that BPC has unilaterally decided to have a NDP why haven't they published the pros, cons, benefits and liabilities to create, maintain and legally defend it? The information should be shared with all residents, not just a select few or group of residents, so that we can all make an informed decision as to the need of a NDP before the need of a referendum.

BPC are residents' elected/co-opted representatives tasked with listening and representing their views. BPC currently receives a budget of £39K a year from residents to facilitate this process and perform specific duties, via NSC/Bleadon precept. "*If we work together, we will be a stronger voice, not a divided community*" raises a number of questions. If BPC are working behind closed doors, with no publicly accessible information on their decision making, and no full public consultation, how can that happen? As BPC appears to be ignoring the views of residents as expressed in the adopted 2009-29 Parish Plan, which BPC declare '*obsolete*', how are residents' views being represented in these decisions? (NB The Good Councillor Guide 2017 states "... *introduce parish plans*"). Why are some BPC decisions contrary to residents' views in the adopted Parish Plan and NSC Local Plan? This is why residents ask us to raise their concerns and views, whether through BOB and/or the Bleadon Action Group.

BPC seem to have a preference to working with select individuals, or groups but **not** informing and/or including all residents in the process! E.g. via agenda, minutes, reports, etc., for example the Management Working Group, Newsletter Working Group, Vexatious Sub-Committee, Neighbourhood Steering Group, etc. The recent email discussed at BAG regarding the BPC Planning Sub-Committee seems to illustrate this. Although we appreciate prior notice of the date of the BPC Planning meeting by a resident, it should have been available to all residents by BPC. All BPC meetings should involve a published agenda, but agenda items for inclusion/interaction by the public need to be submitted 10 clear working days before councillors meet. The timing of the subsequent published minutes also can affect resident's ability to submit informed agenda items. For example:

- 20 Oct 17 – Final submission date for agenda items by the public for the BPC inaugural Planning meeting
- 25 Oct 17 – BAG informed of the meeting (too late for inclusion of BAG agenda items)
- 31 Oct 17 – BPC inform residents of meeting by publishing the agenda (too late for inclusion of resident agenda items)
- 06 Nov 17 – BPC councillors meet
- At some point BPC will publish the minutes up to 10 working days before their next meeting. For monthly meetings this is at a similar time to the next agenda deadline (If there isn't sufficient time for residents to find and read minutes they can't effectively interact with the process or meetings)

It should be remembered that less than 20 people regularly attend council meetings, leaving the overwhelming majority dependent on BPC agenda, minutes, reports, etc. How were all residents informed of the date of this inaugural Planning meeting so that they could be involved in the process, as we could find no published reference to it by BPC? Similarly, how were all residents informed that the deadline for the Parish Newsletter is this week, as we can find no published reference to the deadline by BPC? We/BOB/residents have asked for a variety of information to be published by BPC but this has not been forthcoming to date. We therefore feel these are just more examples of the need for timely and accurate access to information from BPC to **all residents, not just selective individuals and/or groups**.