

Making Progress

Response to Neighbourhood Plan

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Ministers Cottage, Middle Stoke, Limpley Stoke, BA2 7GF

This has been written rather quickly and printed out on the Monday morning so please forgive any dreadful mistakes you may find! We discussed the plan and considered the tick boxes carefully. You will find on our survey we have made notes on each where it seemed appropriate but we'll summarise our comments here.

In general...

We had a small concern that in some cases, we really shouldn't have a say in some matters because we are not the ones who would most directly be affected by the change, or because we have no interest in the outcome either way. It concerned us that perhaps the survey does not reflect the proportional importance of different stake-holders. For example, the rest of the village might have agreed an imaginary proposal to convert Limpley Stoke village hall into a shop, whilst local residents would decry the nightmare of parking (which is already an issue) that would result, making their lives a lot more stressful on an everyday basis. We are not affected by the building of a pavement for school-to-galleries pedestrian movement, but someone who actually lives there might. If we vote "yes", it seems we are having say in something we shouldn't. As prospective parents we'd appreciate having our voice heard but we would like to respect the wishes of the people that might be more directly affected more frequently and for a longer duration than say we would were we parents of children attending the school.

Point by point...

A1 Of course we want housing for everyone that needs it... but how will this be achieved..? Our answer would depend upon things like whether it would involve infilling green sites in existing built areas (we would be thoroughly against this) and how the housing would be provided. Would the out-dated "for profit" custom of selling a used home for more than it cost to build which in turn also promotes for-profit renting as a means to turn someone's home into a cash cow be continued? Or would some new system be implemented that keeps the housing whenever it becomes available again under the jurisdiction of the community, with prices forced to be reasoned based on investment made to that property in the form of maintenance and improvement by the person that lived in it, not their want to recover vast sums of money from the sale for having used the building for many years (if you tried to do this with a car, you'd be laughed at and it's about time property markets started serving the people that *need* their products)?

A2 We love the idea of the Housing Trust, returning property to the village when up for sale so that it can be sold not to a landlord looking for a cash cow, but to a family or person in need of a *home* who has merit for bringing benefit to the community. Note we place higher value on "benefit to the community" than "happens to be related in some way to someone in the village" therefore ensuring even the most worthless person can come to live here so long as they have proven ties. How exactly does one come to live or work here, if we were not already living and working here? Merit should play a big role, blood ties and such should play a lesser role. It should be an honour and a privilege to be here. I'm not asking for someone who's going to mow the verges for free on a Sunday, but I *am* saying "Do we have a plumber? Do we need a plumber? What about a roofer? Or someone with retail experience, or academic expertise that they could and would be willing to lend to community projects on an ask-me-and-I'll-answer basis?"

A3 Absolutely not if it involves "infill"! What makes a village a village and not a town is that there are still green spaces between houses, the odd field, or bit of grass, or waste land which also

happens to be a haven for wild life supported not least by the invasion of agriculture in between the buildings. Brownfield sites are areas that have already been used for something, and at least if we clean them up for housing, they must be sufficiently cleaned up as to make them environmentally sound and good enough for people. This is especially good practice as it promotes environmental clean-up and prevents growth over green lands. Growth *is* a problem though, and the villages are going to have to one day reckon with that, lest they eventually – by the time their grand children come to be grand children – be a town, not a village and all this talk will be for nought.

A5 and A6: Complete agreement.

B1 In all fairness it doesn't matter who owns it, but I would for future generations like to preserve the keeping of livestock on it. Small livestock that can serve education purposes for the school, pleasant views and the sounds of village life for the rest of us and retain the mixed environment that helps make this area a haven for all sorts of wildlife. There are ways that all of the above can be improved for mutual benefit of all stakeholders. Ownership doesn't matter, but protecting the land is something we have to peg down for future generations.

B2 It was exceptionally unfortunate that in this proposal and all others relating to this area of land, there is absolutely no mention, no allowance, and thus apparently no consultation to consider the needs of the people living closest to that land. The parking situation on Middle Stoke is dire when it doesn't have to be. Nearly all cars have a place of some kind or other, but there are squabbles and the use of on-road spaces by the village hall only adds to the problem, it doesn't make it. We hope to help at some point put forwards the necessity for a survey of the cars parked along the road, consultation of residents, and the idea proposed that every house without off-road parking be granted one space to claim as their own, that they can expect, with due courtesy, that other would-be users and uses are passed under their scrutiny first for approval. This may in fact call for two or three spaces to be reserved for local residents on any parking area on this wasteland mentioned. It may not. We don't know unless we actually get to grips with the problem and know the full details. It might be that with a little consultation and ongoing surveillance, that extra parking for the village hall be moderately unnecessary if residents are not using their spots at times of day the hall would be used. This is the smart solution, and the one that avoids conflicts of interest between different stakeholders. Either way however, local residents deserve priority. The people that use the hall and the park come to those locations for all but a few hours, we who live here, live here and that means that the inconvenience and stress to us is up to twelve times more if a resident is going to and from home frequently during the course of the day but having to relocate their vehicle many more times on top of this due to parking problems. It's about time this was recognised.

C1 This sounds sensible enough, although enforcement is the issue. We suspect most of the people that overtake and speed along that road, would do so regardless what the road signs and markings say.

C2 The Highways Agency needs to ensure that changes do not create new problems or exacerbate old ones with regards to traffic intensity and behaviour. Putting a "children and elderly" crossing sign would certainly help slow traffic down. Also... if we have any large wildlife... it would be nice to use them too! A pity we do not have red deer... *nobody* wants to hit one of them, because they will write off their vehicle in one go!

C3 Absolute agreement.

C4 through to C6: We prefer to defer judgement to those that live in the place that changes are being proposed, to let residents and businesses that will be directly affected by the changes have the last say on this and advice alternatives if needs be.

C7 Please see **B2**.

C8 Sounds good, but not if it means incremental loss of green space with each consecutive improvement now and in future. We'd need more detail on how this would be done before we support or disapprove.

C9 See **C4-C6**.

C10 We hope this will be good for the farmer too, although we *would* like to still be able to cross to the shop through the field. Walking through there and seeing the cows on a non-wet day is a real pleasure, and one we consider to be one of the crowning features of the village and living here. We feel truly honoured and grateful that the farmer permits people into his field in this manner, and would love perhaps to find one day there is an arrangement between the farmer and the local community that we can give the cows select food at a feeding station. It is lovely to see them!

C11-C13: See **B2**.

D1 We like the sound of this, but would want to know more about how. The method would dictate our support or disapproval. We welcome the idea of making village life easier, but we're wary of setting up a "town centre". Where we came from, "providing a centre for the two villages" is how our urban sprawl began. The places we used to live were when our parents were children very small towns. When their parents' parents were small children, they looked more like villages. Going back, the sprawl started with a view not dissimilar to how Limpley Stoke and Freshford look now, but if you visit where we grew up, you would cry to realise what the future of Limpley Stoke and Freshford stands to be unless measures are taken to control the number of people living here such that numbers can only increase by building vertically upwards, not outwards (and even then there are limits). Don't forget that even a doctors surgery in that location isn't exactly reachable by someone who needs to see the doctor if they lived e.g. by the Rose and Crown and had a poorly foot or couldn't go out in the winter cold without feeling worse. Doctors mean cars and parking for those cars, unless you have a means to combine a ring-and-ride service with them and allow all doctor's patients from within our area eligibility for rides (this could work very well I suppose).

D2 Whilst we've said yes to this, this is more to agree that existing users use the hall now and they should have their activities protected and not ignored for the sake of grander long-term schemes.

D3 See **C8**.

D4 Again, sounds great but... how? "How" dictates "yay" or "nay".

D5 Yes – the train station would benefit from more parking although as this is a small local station, we would strongly suggest that you make all parking preserved for locals and visitors to the local area only on a priority basis. Nobody wants a park-and-ride open to all the area, but younger couples might find it easier to move to Limpley Stoke if transport to Bath is easier in terms of allowance for working hours.

E1 Steve wanted to ask how you intended to do this and with his job as an IT field service for Wessex Water, he encourages you to perhaps not ask this question until you know the details of how you might go about it. Why? Because as with many of the questions in the survey, it's not what people want that concerns them, its *how* it will be done. He says that for example, there was a project Wessex Water was involved with looking at laying fibre-optic cables along existing sewerage systems. The project failed quite spectacularly and whilst better ways are now being thought for how to make the project work, the problem is cost. He says there are few alternatives to digging up the roads around the area which would cause massive disruption and would also likely be very expensive.

E2 Workshops as with all else: brownfield sites absolutely should be used for something, and places for artisans and other small businesses to set up would be lovely, but at no point would either of us ever agree that infilling is right. Public planning rules stake out a patch of land where you can

build, and the surrounding area that you can't. However they failed in planning rules to consider the fact that it is the green spaces *between* houses, shops, workshops etc. that makes us feel less packed in, closer to nature, and in essence define what we love most about villages. Fill in these gaps and it will quickly begin to feel like a town. The few bits of 'wasteland' left end up becoming dumps because nobody wants to use them, whereas when you have lots of green space mixed in, people feel close to nature and have a natural instinct to treat it better. Trust us, we come from your worst nightmares and we've seen where infilling eventually ends up. Don't let it happen. It's legal but it's wrong.

E3 Be very careful because telephone coverage and broadband are not necessarily separate problems. In particular at the last open meeting Emily was told that one proposal for improving mobile phone connectivity was to play boxes on telephone poles but what does that tell you? That they were likely going to use the telephone lines – likely internet which runs through them – in order to boost the signal. We have such a box (a miniature one) at home for when Steve is on call and must be contactable via his work mobile. The transmitter uses the internet to carry the mobile phone's communications. If these things use the phone lines (for internet or otherwise) then you can assume that it is going to increase traffic along those lines, meaning in turn that traffic may run slower and internet users who do not consider **E1** to be a problem, may change their minds. People do not enjoy competing, so they try to work together and competition between businesses is no different where they can find a way around it. It would be a fantastic scheme to first get people of the villages to pay or councils to pay for increased mobile phone connectivity, then because this impacts upon internet connectivity and makes it worse, get the people to pay again this time to upgrade to faster internet. What a scam! Be very careful of this. You need people with communications expertise that have no vested interests to advise you. Steve is very busy with work but you can always drop Emily an email (aberfruitcake@hotmail.com or elp25@bath.ac.uk) and she will ask him about it at an opportune moment and then get back to you! We'd hope you might have other experienced networks engineers in the area too that you can go to if needs be.