

Soberton Parish Plan

A vision for the future of our community



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Community, the Parish Council and Winchester City Council**

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Executive Summary

This Parish Plan had been produced by local people from the Parish of Soberton and has taken two and a half years. During this period a questionnaire, public meetings and a further Blueprint questionnaire and consultation have been undertaken.

The Plan sets out the concerns of the residents and their desires for the future. The key issues are summarised below.

Environment

The Parish believes that any development in the Parish should be sensitive to, and be designed to maintain and enhance, the natural environment. In particular:

- visual glimpses and gaps should be retained;
- active woodland and wildlife management should be encouraged;
- footpaths and bridleways should be enhanced to improve accessibility; and
- replacing or supporting fences with hedgerows should be encouraged.

Health, Wellbeing and Social

The Parish would like to see future development in the village include:-

- encouragement for local clubs and societies;
- support for places of worship and other community facilities;
- increased use of community facilities;
- an increase in affordable housing provision, subject to the environmental considerations outlined above;
- greater support for the elderly and disabled and accessibility to their support services;
- maintenance and improved access to footpaths and bridleways;
- improved services to facilitate working from home; and
- improved facilities for supporting the creation of non-industrial small businesses.

Communications & Transport

It is a key priority for the Parish to see:-

- improved broadband speeds to make working from home more viable and to support small businesses in the Parish;
- initiatives to provide public access to the internet for those who do not have access at home; and
- on-going maintenance of road surfaces, together with verges and kerbstones, and enforcement of speed limits.

The Parish would strongly support initiatives to:-

- improve regular and frequent public transport between the village and larger centres of population;
- improve public transport from the Parish to schools outside the Parish; and
- encourage collective transport from outside the Parish for children attending the Parish's infant school.

Conclusion

Those matters which gain the highest priority for Parishioners relate to the character and visual amenity of the Parish, retention of its rural character, the gaps between development, the open views of the countryside. Much concern relates to erosion of this character by poor husbandry of the land, ah-hoc parking of caravans or mobile homes, changes of use, industrial or incompatible uses and over intensive uses.

Generally, the condition of roads and speed limits remain on-going concerns. The Parish has developed a range of indoor and outdoor amenities which are well used but maintenance of these facilities is vital. New facilities are continually being considered.

Public transport concerns have been partly met by the daily bus which runs through Newtown and the community bus which runs daily to various destinations. However, without a regular hourly bus the private car will unfortunately remain the prime means of transport for those who live in the Parish.

John Hyland,
Chairman, Soberton Parish Council.

Introduction

In November 2000, the Government published a rural White Paper entitled “Our Countryside – the Future”. This initiated the concept of Parish Plans. In 2007 the Soberton Parish Council, with encouragement from the Winchester District Strategic Partnership, asked for members of the community to get involved in a more comprehensive assessment of community views on all aspects of village life to be expressed in the Soberton Parish Plan.

The Soberton Parish Plan has been prepared by the Parish Plan Steering Committee and takes into account the views of people who live and work in the Parish. The Soberton Parish Plan includes all communities within Soberton, Newtown, Soberton Heath, Grenville Hall, Hoe Gate, Hundred Acres, Woodend and Kingsmead.

Since April 2010, the northern part of the Parish and the Forest of Bere have been included within the boundary of the South Downs National Park. From April 2011 planning policy for that part of the Parish has been determined by the National Park Authority, although at the time of writing the Authority has delegated certain planning functions to Winchester City Council.

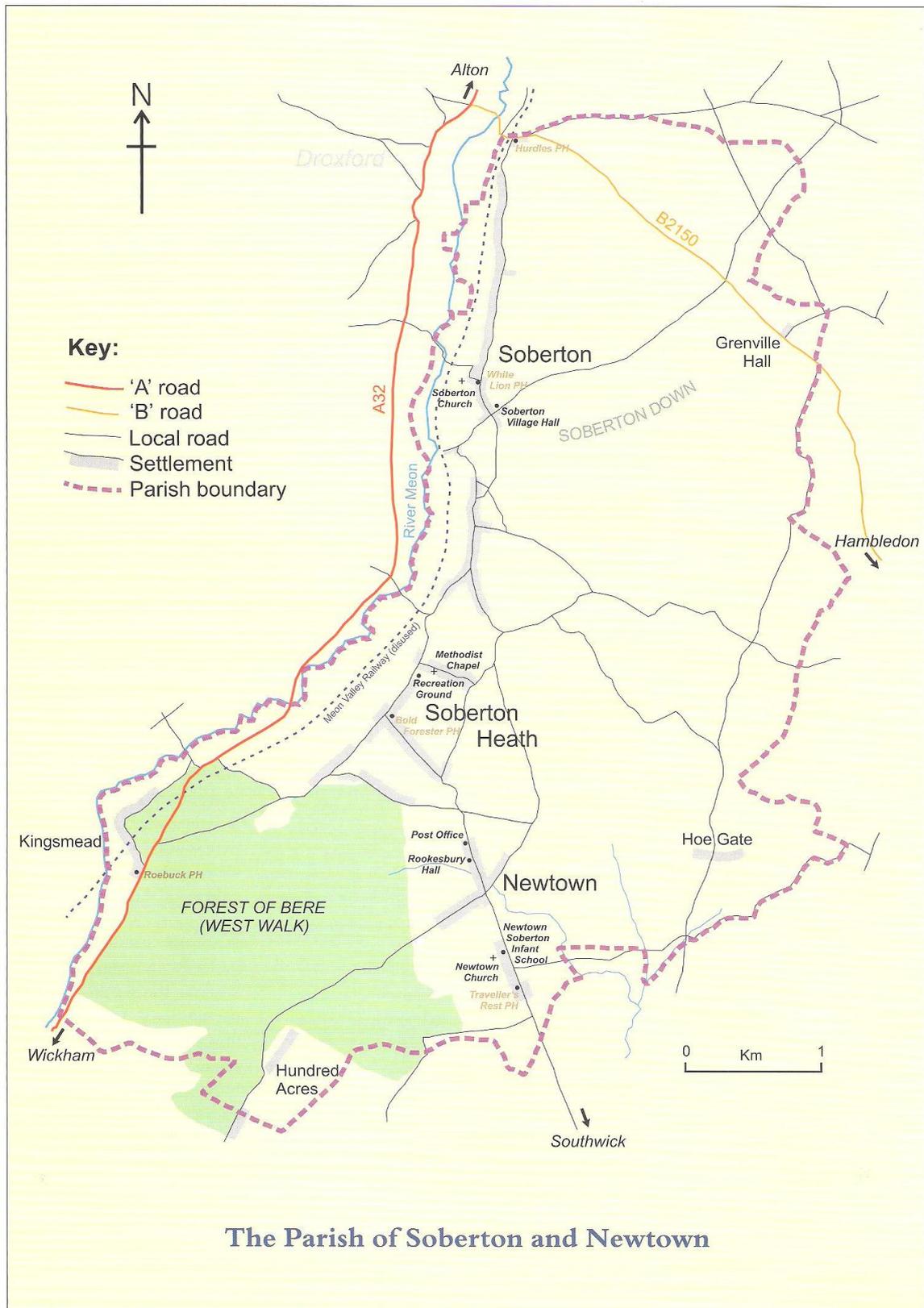
Soberton Parish

The Parish covers approximately 2,400 hectares (9 square miles) and has a total population approaching 1,600. As described in the Village Design Statement (VDS) the attractive countryside contains a mixture of agricultural land, down land, forest and water meadows.

The three main villages within the Parish, Soberton, Soberton Heath and Newtown together with the smaller settlements of Grenville Hall, Hoe Gate, Hundred Acres, Woodend and Kingsmead mostly lie in a dispersed linear pattern stretching along the Meon Valley for about 5 miles.

The inclusion of the northern part of the Parish and the Forest of Bere within the boundaries of the South Downs National Park means that the conservation and enhancement of this landscape and its local distinctiveness will be paramount. The characteristic green gaps, open views and glimpses that have been detailed in the VDS are valued features of this settlement and need to be adhered to for future planning developments.

Map of the Parish



An interactive map of the South Downs National Parks is available at:
<http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/enjoying/visitor-information/>

The Purpose of the Parish Plan

The purpose of the Parish Plan is to articulate those issues that are really important to the residents of Soberton Parish and to give those residents a voice in shaping the future of their community. In particular, the Parish Plan:-

- reflects the views of all sections of the community;
- identifies features and local characteristics of the community that people value;
- identifies local needs and opportunities;
- sets out a vision of how people want their community to develop and improve; and
- includes an Action Plan to achieve this vision.

In doing so, the Parish Plan encourages residents of the Parish to:-

- be more aware of their surroundings and local needs;
- identify what features of the community they want to protect and enhance;
- give the Parish Council greater support and a mandate for taking actions on their behalf;
- provide an effective route to win funding for local initiatives; and
- identify initiatives that can be delivered by the community itself.

The Parish Plan will also support the Parish Council's work in influencing service providers such as the South Downs National Park Authority, Hampshire County Council, Hampshire Primary Care Trust, Winchester City Council and other authorities whose decisions affect the Parish;

The Process

In response to an open meeting and an advertisement in the Parish Magazine a small group convened to form a steering committee. Members subsequently contacted and gave presentations to local groups, including youth groups, before designing a questionnaire.

Copies of the questionnaire were delivered to every household (611) in the Parish by 20 volunteers. 246 responses were received and they were collated and analysed.

Further comment was requested via a prominent article in the December 2009 Parish Magazine and a Blueprint questionnaire was circulated to every household in the Parish in the autumn of 2010.

The Parish Council adopted the Parish Plan in December 2011 and the Plan feeds into the Winchester District Strategic Partnership and the Sustainable Community Strategy for Winchester District.

The Vision

Environment

The Parish benefits from being an unusually beautiful and special location and it is vitally important that this is retained for future generations. The surrounding fields and open spaces have kept the settlements within the Parish small, contained and distinct, which gives the Parish much of its charm.

The green glimpses of open country and visual gaps between houses, together with easy access to the surrounding countryside via footpaths and bridleways, are important features of the Parish. Since April 2010, the northern part of the Parish and the Forest of Bere have been included within the boundary of the South Downs National Park.

There is, however, a growing threat of expanding housing development to the south and east of the Parish, with an associated increase in traffic, and this could have a significant negative impact on the environmental features that the residents of the Parish treasure.

In addition, the Parish appears to suffer from incidents of fly-tipping, which place a burden on those local authorities that have the responsibility for clearing the waste.

Those matters which gain the highest priority for Parishioners relate to the character and visual amenity of the Parish, retention of its rural character, the gaps between development and the open views of the countryside. Much concern relates to erosion of this character by poor husbandry of the land, ah-hoc parking of caravans or mobile homes, changes of use, industrial or incompatible uses and over intensive uses.

The Parish residents therefore believe that any development within the Parish boundary should be sensitive to, and be designed to maintain and enhance, the natural environment. In particular:

- visual glimpses and gaps should be retained;
- active woodland and wildlife management should be encouraged;
- footpaths and bridleways should be maintained;
- natural features such as the River Meon, Soberton Down and the surrounding downland should be protected;
- fences should be replaced or supported by hedgerows of native species; and
- the cumulative effect of the proposed development taken in conjunction with existing similar developments must not produce an impact greater than that of the development itself

Many residents choose to live in the village to enjoy a quieter, more tranquil pace of life which is relatively free from traffic and urban noise. They value the inclusive, friendly and caring village community with its mixture of ages and its traditional values, together with the good quality of life that this brings.

Planning and Enforcement

The Village Design Statement (VDS) which forms part of this Plan, sets out a series of design guidelines that the residents of the Parish believe should be taken into account in Winchester City Council's criteria-based approach to local development.

Health, Wellbeing and Social

There is an infant school within the Parish, which is well attended by local children.

The Parish benefits a range of public amenities, including two village halls and the new church rooms at St Peter's Church, Soberton, which offer a wide variety of facilities and are used by community groups, clubs and societies from within the Parish and from outside.

There are five Public Houses in the Parish (the Traveller's Rest, the Roebuck, the Bold Forester, the White Lion and the Hurdles), which provide essential social foci for parishioners, and two churches that provide both spiritual and pastoral support.

Rookesbury Hall in Newtown hosts a part-time post office once a week and a mobile library visits the Parish on a monthly cycle.

However, over a number of years the stock of smaller two or three bedroom houses has declined as a result of development and rebuilding and this reduces the accessibility of the village to younger and older residents and to Parishioners who may work locally and thus be on lower incomes than those who commute to London or other cities. This in turn has the longer-term effect of reducing the diversity of age groups and socio-economic groups within the Parish.

The Parish would like to see future development in the village include:-

- encouragement for local clubs and societies;
- support for places of worship and other community facilities;
- increased use of community facilities;
- an increase in affordable housing provision, subject to the environmental considerations outlined above; and
- greater support for the elderly and disabled and accessibility to their support services.

Recreation and Play

Formal facilities in the Parish are limited to the Recreation Ground and Pavilion on Heath Road; this facility has recently been extended to install a new playground for 11- 14 year olds but further work is required and upkeep will require on-going commitment. The Parish is well endowed with informal recreation in the form of footpaths and bridleways including two long distance footpaths (the Wayfarers Walk and the former Alton – Fareham railway line).

Employment

The rural nature of the village is such that it is not an appropriate place for employment development and the Parish is generally not supportive of industrial development or the use of land by open storage businesses.

The Parish would, however, like to see:-

- improved services to facilitate working from home; and
- improved facilities for supporting the creation and development of non-industrial small businesses.

Communications & Transport

The Parish is served by a bi-monthly Parish Magazine which is full of community information and details of the many activities, clubs and societies in the Parish.

However, although the internet is increasingly being used as the primary means of communication by many organisations, including local and national Government, a significant proportion of residents in the Parish do not have ready access to the internet. For those residents who do have access to the internet, concerns exist relating to the relatively slow broadband speeds experienced in the village.

It is a key priority for the Parish to see:-

- improved broadband speeds to make working from home more viable and to support small businesses in the Parish; and
- initiatives to provide public access to the internet for those who do not have access at home but who would like to be able to use it.

However, the Parish also wishes to ensure that printed and other non-electronic means of communication remain available where appropriate.

Transport and Roads

Long-standing matters of concern to residents include speeding traffic and the poor state of the roads. Since the first questionnaire was circulated the traffic speeds throughout the Parish have been limited to 30mph and many of the road surfaces have been replaced. However, some stretches of road remain in poor condition, as do many verges and kerbstones, and these issues continue to be of concern. In addition, the matter of speeding persists.

The Parish therefore considers on-going maintenance of road surfaces, together with verges and kerbstones, and enforcement of speed limits on an ad hoc basis to be significant priorities.

Public Transport and Community Transport

The community bus runs to various locations for daily shopping trips and a regular bus route serves the very south of the Parish daily.

However, for those residents of the Parish who do not have ready access to a private car, the relatively limited availability of public transport severely restricts access to important amenities such as schools, shops, doctors and hospitals. This can lead to increased isolation for some residents and dependence on private cars increases the overall cost of living in the Parish.

The Parish would therefore strongly support initiatives to:-

- improve regular and frequent public transport between the village and larger centres of population;
- improve public transport from the Parish to schools outside the Parish; and
- encourage collective transport from outside the Parish for children attending the Parish's infant school.

Action Plan

This section is dynamic and will be updated and reported on a quarterly basis on the Parish website: www.soberton.org

Environment

ISSUE	SOLUTION	PRIORITY	PARTNERS
1. Accessibility of Footpaths & Bridleways	Raise awareness of the Rights of Way Web site Maintenance of footpaths and bridleways	Medium	SPC, HCC
2. Litter	Organisation of local litter picking days Encourage prompt reporting of fly-tipping Improved accessibility of waste recycling facilities	Medium	SPC, WCC, local volunteers

Planning and Enforcement

ISSUE	SOLUTION	PRIORITY	PARTNERS
3. Planning Enforcement	Encourage residents to inform WCC of planning contraventions Produce Neighbourhood Plan to address issues of inappropriate development and cumulative effect	High	SPC, WCC, local residents

Health, Wellbeing and Social

ISSUE	SOLUTION	PRIORITY	PARTNERS
4. Access to shops	Need for a local shop		
5. Prevention of Crime	Maintain the Police presence in the village Regular communication between law-enforcement partners Promote Neighbourhood Watch scheme	High	Police, SPC, safer Neighbourhood teams
6. Support for elderly and disabled	Create a good network of communications & support for those looking after older people or disabled people		HCC, WCC,
7. Affordable housing	Support increased provision of affordable housing		WCC
8. Community facilities	Encourage increased use of community facilities		SPC, local groups

Recreation and Play

ISSUE	SOLUTION	PRIORITY	PARTNERS
9. Local recreation facilities	Maintain and improve recreation ground, pavilion, skate park and play area		SPC, WCC
10. Social groups	Promote and support social groups in the Parish, including use of community facilities		SPC, local groups

Employment

ISSUE	SOLUTION	PRIORITY	PARTNERS
11. Local employment	Support creation of local businesses Encourage local employers to advertise vacancies locally (e.g. on Parish website)		SPC, WCC

Communications

ISSUE	SOLUTION	PRIORITY	PARTNERS
12. Broadband	Improve broadband speed		BT
13. Comms	Encourage use of non-electronic comms such as Parish notice boards		SPC

Transport and Roads

ISSUE	SOLUTION	PRIORITY	PARTNERS
14. Reduce levels of speeding	Community Speed Watch	High	Police, HCC, Safer Neighbourhood teams
15. Reduce congestion around the school	Improved liaison with Hampshire Traffic Police and Hampshire County Council Improved signage, and off road parking	High	Newtown and Soberton School, safer routes to school, HCC, SPC
16. Road Surfaces	More awareness of online complaints Repairs to pot holes and road edges	High	HCC

Public and Community Transport

ISSUE	SOLUTION	PRIORITY	PARTNERS
17. To promote community transport	Improve public transport between Parish and larger centres of population More frequent publications of time table Encourage collective transport from outside Parish for children attending Parish school	High	WACA, Meon Valley Carers, Community transport, WCC, HCC

Conclusions

In general, the residents of Soberton Parish share **a desire to protect, preserve and enhance their community and their village way of life for future generations**. In particular, residents believe that:-

1. The rural character of the Parish must be retained:
 - open views and access to the countryside must be preserved
 - any development in the Parish should be sensitive to, and be designed to maintain and enhance, the natural environment;
 - visual glimpses and gaps should be retained;
 - active and sympathetic woodland, hedgerow and wildlife management should be encouraged;
 - footpaths and bridleways should be maintained;
 - replacing or supporting fences with hedgerows should be encouraged.

2. The Parish's social and community facilities and activities should be encouraged:
 - local clubs and societies should be encouraged;
 - increased use of places of worship and other community facilities should be encouraged;
 - affordable housing provision should be increased, subject to the environmental considerations outlined above;
 - greater support for the elderly and disabled and accessibility to their support services should be provided;
 - access to footpaths and bridleways should be maintained and improved;
 - services to facilitate working from home should be improved;
 - facilities for supporting the creation of non-industrial small businesses should be improved;

3. The Parish's communications and transport networks should be enhanced:
 - broadband speeds and mobile phone coverage should be improved to make working from home more viable and to support small businesses in the Parish;
 - initiatives to provide public access to the internet for those who do not have access at home should be supported;
 - road surfaces, together with verges and kerbstones, must be maintained and enforcement of speed limits needs to be improved;
 - regular and frequent public transport between the village and larger centres of population needs to be improved;
 - collective transport from outside the Parish for children attending the Parish's infant school should be encouraged.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all residents of the Parish who returned questionnaires or who otherwise contributed towards this Plan. Many one- off comments were made which it has not been possible to include in the analysis.

Thanks also to the many helpers who delivered the questionnaires.