

## **BROCKENHURST VILLAGE CENTRE**

### **A STRATEGY FOR FUTURE SUCCESS**

#### **Introduction**

Advances in technology, especially on-line retailing, are creating negative pressures on retail and social centres. These pressures have increased exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic and will have long term consequences on the way people shop and live their lives.

Brockenhurst is a successful New Forest rural service village with 3500 inhabitants. It is also a year-round tourist destination and, at times during the summer, the population can double due to the number of people staying in nearby campsites. The village is also enjoyed by many day visitors who help support a thriving local economy based on tourism. The winter season is supported by several high-end hotels, which receive accolades nationally, and bed and breakfast businesses and by the 3000 local college students who shop there daily. However, despite these benefits, the village is not immune to the pressures of change.

The Parish Council has therefore set up a Village Centre Strategy Working Party to create a brief to be sent to three consultants for tender, setting out the parameters of a project to enhance the village centre in order to ensure that Brockenhurst remains a place where local people and visitors want to live, work and play, with the emphasis on putting local people first. This brief sets out proposed actions to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the current situation and plan the way forward, making due allowance for climate change, environmental issues and other threats.

Brockenhurst is situated in the very heart of the New Forest National Park. It is an area of historic landscape and settlement which has developed its unique character over several hundred years. The settlement is surrounded by Forest and heathland, and to the south by the more productive agricultural land of the coastal plain. The division of the medieval landscape into several manors and the controlling influence

of the surrounding Royal Forest influenced the plan form of the settlement. The presence of the medieval church does not seem to have acted as a catalyst for nucleated development around it and the settlement pattern in the area would seem to have been more of small, dispersed farmsteads on the manorial holdings.

The creation of the turnpike in the 18th century encouraged some linear development along the Lyndhurst to Lymington Road. However, the real spur for economic growth would appear to have been the coming of the railway and location of the station. The breakup and sale of Brookley Manor (on the site of the Watersplash Hotel, now Holmwood) in the late 19th century also provided the opportunity for the expansion of the settlement, the development of a commercial centre and the ribbon developments of late Victorian and Edwardian villas. The occurrence of this development in such a short time frame and the use of locally available materials have given the settlement its unique character.

Waters Green, which was originally an area of dispersed small encroachment cottages, developed as a distinct area of settlement towards the end of the 19th century over a period of about 15 years. This resulted in the cohesive character of this small area with a mixture of buildings of both higher and lower status reflecting the developing economy of the area. The 19th and early 20th centuries were the main period of growth with the commercial area of Brookley Road created to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding settlement and the wider agricultural community. The settlement has continued to service both the local and wider communities as a commercial centre but has also become important for this area of the New Forest as a centre for education, recreation and tourism.

Most of the built environment within the conservation area dates to the boom period of growth at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries where buildings display cohesive design, styles and materials. These and earlier buildings have survived remarkably intact. Beyond the boundaries of the conservation area, development has continued with the construction of small estates. In the main these are low density developments sensitive to the more rural nature of the settlement. Trees, hedges and green open spaces are very important components of the character of the settlement and even the more commercial spaces are close to trees

and open public spaces. The settlement has retained its village character rather than becoming a regional town. Designation of the area as a conservation area has sought to ensure that the character and qualities of the area are preserved, that all new development respects the special character of the area and historic and architectural features are retained.

Brockenhurst is served by a mainline railway station on the London Waterloo to Weymouth line and, as such, is within commuting distance of London. There is also a branch line to Lymington Town and Lymington Quay which connects with the ferry to the Isle of Wight. The A337 from the M27 at Cadnam to Christchurch, Dorset, runs through the eastern edge of the village and carries very heavy traffic, which bypasses the village centre. Traffic is often stationary because the railway line is busy, and the crossing gates are often down. The A337 leading to the level crossing is lined with pubs, cafés and restaurants, one convenience store, a cycle shop and a property lettings agency. There is a junction immediately before the level crossing which takes traffic into the centre of the village through a secondary retail and hospitality section and this junction is complicated by the entrance into the station. Planning permission has recently been granted for the redevelopment of a site opposite The Huntsman as a large café and four holiday lets, directly against the advice of the Parish Council as it does not take account of the special character of the village, the need for local housing, the lack of parking and the negative effect on the village of too many holiday lets.

The village is divided into different areas – Balmer Lawn on the left of the approach into Brockenhurst from the north, Waters Green and the conservation area, the A337 area already described, Brookley Road east of Grigg Lane with a mix of independent retail and hospitality, Sway Road, the main shopping street of Brookley Road in the village centre which includes the Watersplash, and residential areas, some of special interest, as highlighted above. The village centre boasts a rich mix of independent and national retail stores including a Post Office in the Welcome Co-op convenience store, a Tesco Express, greengrocer, bakery, butcher, pet shop, art gallery, opticians, florist, estate agents, funeral directors, hairdressers, card and gift shops, a destination ironmonger, home interiors, Parish Council office, offices, cafés and others. The depth and strength of this mix attracts a clientele from an area much

wider than just the village itself. There is on street parking and two car parks, one behind the Welcome Co-op and one beside Tesco Express but this is not sufficient at busy times and some feel that a greater number of local people should be encouraged to cycle and walk into the village for their needs.

## **THE WORKING PARTY BRIEF**

This brief will be sent to three consultants, experts in the field of placemaking, to tender for the project study.

The consultants will need to: -

- use a variety of consultative methods such as surveys, focus groups, statistical analysis, trial layouts etc.
- work with the Village Centre Working Group with regular feedback at agreed intervals to assess the feasibility of any proposals in our complicated and unique environment.
- present the findings and recommendations in a full report to the Parish Council with enough copies for other relevant organisations.

The Report should provide evidence in answering the following questions:

- Is there shared recognition between local stakeholders, such as the Parish Council, local businesses, residents, schools, doctors, public transport providers, local organisations, as well as visitors and tourists, that the needs of the catchment are changing and will change further as a result of COVID 19 and climate change?
- Is there shared understanding that change must occur?
- Is there a shared agreement to establish a proactive process where Brockenhurst anticipates the need for change and is ready to adapt and move forward rather than wait for the consequences of lack of action to force change?

Once this work is done, the results need to be set against what the village presently offers – does it meet the current needs and future expectations of the demographics? If not, what changes are required?

Any plan or change needs to have done the following:

1. Matched the needs of the users of Brockenhurst
2. Considered the capabilities of the local community and the expertise from the wider commercial environment.
3. Engaged all stakeholders in the village so that all ideas, needs and capabilities can be considered.
4. Assessed the offer and proposals against the competition – Burley and Beaulieu.
5. Identified what else Brockenhurst might offer?
6. Suggested how can its unique capabilities be used?
7. Advised which partners will be needed?
8. Advised how investment will be secured?
9. What is the timescale for change?
10. Advise how the USPs can work better together?

If changes were to be made, the consultants should recommend how co-ordination of the responsible bodies may be achieved to ensure all partners make changes together in a timely fashion and that Brockenhurst's offer is geared towards continuous, proactive change.

What the selected consultants will be asked to do can be summarised as:

- Assess the demographic. Analyse the users of the village centre, which may have altered as a result of COVID-19, and compare this with the current situation.
- Assess what Brockenhurst currently offers and decide what else is required in the short, medium and long term, including any temporary measures, and

recommend what changes are needed to achieve these objectives. Compare with the competition from Burley and Beaulieu.

- Recommend a structure for managing the practicalities of change and ensure this is sustainable in the long term.

The selected consultants will present evidence from the above consultation to the Parish Council and its partners, along with evidential support for their recommendations, which will include a framework for future actions as and when funds become available. Brockenhurst must primarily remain relevant to the people who live and work there and, secondly, remain attractive to visitors because they are vital to the local economy.

## HELPFUL LINKS

Helpful links and contacts:

Brockenhurst is in the New Forest National Park which is the local Planning Authority. All roads are the responsibility of Hampshire Highways.

Brockenhurst Parish Council [www.brockenhurst.gov.uk](http://www.brockenhurst.gov.uk)

New Forest National Park Authority [www.newforestnpa.gov.uk](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk)

Hampshire Highways [www.hants.gov.uk](http://www.hants.gov.uk)

Consultants may also wish to view the web site of the Verderers of the New Forest <https://www.verderers.org.uk>. The verderers control the historic rights of commoners to depasture ponies, cattle and donkeys on the open lands of the New Forest. These commoner animals have rights to roam freely, including Brookley Road, at all times. Approximately 12000 animals are currently depastured within the historic areas of the forest."

Brief to be sent to potential consultants, Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority

Suggested consultees in no particular order:

Doctors' and dentists' surgeries

Businesses – Brockenhurst Business Association and individual businesses

Sports Clubs

Brockenhurst Primary School

Brockenhurst Nursery

Brockenhurst College

Brockenhurst Village Trust

Brockenhurst Climate Action Team

Brockenhurst Parish Council

Friends of Brockenhurst

Greener Brockenhurst

Care Homes

Police

Morebus

South Western Railway

Friends of Brockenhurst Station

Residents

Brockenhurst Playgroup

Women's Institute

The churches

Tourism – Hotels, Campsites, Visitors, both staying and day

Please note this list may not be exhaustive.