

# *Creating a Better Beaconsfield*



## **Towards A TOWN PLAN FOR BEACONSFIELD 2015–2020**

A report by *Vision for Beaconsfield*  
July 2015

*Our thanks to local artist Paul Bell for permission to use his fine sketch of a Beaconsfield scene as our cover illustration.*

# WELCOME

This report has been drawn together by the volunteer Group *Vision for Beaconsfield*, an independent community group tasked by Beaconsfield Town Council with bringing together a robust evidence base for the development of a new Town Plan. In appointing us, the Council expressed its wish to give local people a say in the plans for Beaconsfield's future.

Our document reflects the hard work of a number of strategic groups of volunteers, who have come together to address the concerns and explore the ideas of hundreds of town residents. It concludes the first phase in a longer process to develop an inspiring vision for our town for 2015–2020 and beyond.

## A Town Plan is for everyone

It is for us as a community to decide what we want to preserve and what we want to change.

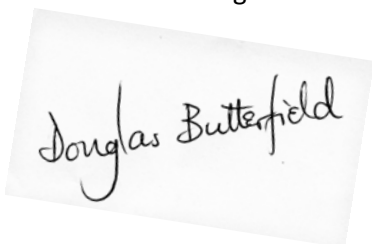
A Town Plan expresses the wishes of the community and shows how those wishes can be realised. It provides a framework for the community as a whole to participate in planning the town's future and a way of measuring progress. It is both practical and aspirational, and it will inevitably evolve as solutions are found and new challenges arise.

Vision for Beaconsfield wishes to continue its work with the Town Council and the town's many stakeholders, helping develop the vision further, recruiting more champions of the vision and assisting in monitoring progress on the Action Plan on behalf of the community. We have worked hard for eight months, but there is still much to do.

## Acknowledgements

The *Vision for Beaconsfield* Steering Group thanks all the people who have taken part in the consultation process, in particular those who have helped us to complete this report in the working groups. We would like to acknowledge the financial assistance and help-in-kind we have received from the Town Council and Buckinghamshire County Council, in particular Margaret Mathie, Natalie Judson, Madeleine Howe and Rebecca Carley. Throughout this process we have been very grateful for the expert guidance, invaluable advice and constructive support of town planning adviser, Alison Eardley.

Without all this generous input, our report would not have happened.

A photograph of a white piece of paper with a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas Butterfield". The paper is slightly tilted and has a soft shadow beneath it.

**Douglas Butterfield**

**Chairman**, on behalf of the V4B Steering Group and Working Groups



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*(Appendices are provided as separate pdf documents)*



# 1 VISION FOR BEACONSFIELD

## WHO ARE WE?

The Vision for Beaconsfield Project came into being at a meeting called by Beaconsfield Town Council on 1 October 2014.

Representatives from a wide range of community organisations were invited to volunteer for an independent, community-led project to develop recommendations for a new Town Plan, to be presented to the Town Council in summer 2015. The project would be funded by the Town Council and Buckinghamshire County Council, and supported 'in kind', with the majority of funding going to employ Towns Alive, a consultancy with wide experience of guiding communities in developing town plans.

A volunteer Steering Group for the project met on 5 November 2014 to agree its Terms of Reference and launch the project, under the guidance of Alison Eardley from Towns Alive.

The group includes representatives of Churches Together, the Beaconsfield Society and Beaconsfield Old Town Residents' Association (BOTRA), Beaconsfield Women's Institute, sports societies and local residents. Three town councillors also serve as independent members. Administrative support is provided by the County Council, with additional support from the Town Council.

The Steering Group has been assisted by five Working Groups and many other individuals, all of whom are volunteers. Together we have carried out a great deal of research and have run community surveys to create this report.

## OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**Holistic** – taking a long view, balancing often conflicting demands and desires, mindful that the impact of wider changes are not easily predictable

**Innovative** – enriching our town's social, cultural and environmental diversity and finding new solutions to old problems, learning from best practice elsewhere

**Courageous** – being prepared to initiate major projects that will benefit our town, investigating their feasibility even where funding is not immediately obvious - and being prepared to raise local funding in the short term for long-term gain

**Collaborative** – harnessing the voluntary sector and the wider community in delivering on projects large and small, encouraging greater involvement of all sectors

**Open** – ensuring that information and debate is put promptly in the public domain so that our whole community is able to access information, engage with debates and become involved in projects.

## WHAT IS A TOWN PLAN FOR?

The role of Vision for Beaconsfield is to provide recommendations for a community-inspired Town Plan which: brings the community together around a vision and key goals; takes that vision forward and enables all parties to support it, linking to it and addressing relevant aspects of agreed key goals.

- A Town Plan enables local people to shape the future of their own local community
- It builds up a picture of what local people see as the key issues affecting them
- It can assist in influencing the more formal organisations servicing their community
- It can be used to help attract more external grant funding to the community
- There may be more services or local projects developed as a result of a plan
- The process brings people together and can increase levels of social inclusion
- It increases people's understanding of local democracy, government structures and responsibilities.

## CAN WE CHANGE BEACONSFIELD?

If a Beaconsfield citizen can create a magical model village in a quiet residential road, there is no reason why we cannot together create a better Beaconsfield.



## WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

Over the last nine months, *Vision for Beaconsfield* has been working within the recommended 'LEAD' framework for developing community-led plans.

### L LAUNCH THE IDEA OF A PLAN

- We met to agree Terms of Reference, roles and responsibilities, and to map out strategy
- Completed initial SWOT and PESTEL analyses (p14-15)
- Set up a website and Facebook page
- Developed a 'Three Wishes for Beaconsfield' survey sent to every primary school in Beaconsfield
- Developed a web-based survey for residents, workers and others
- Launched the project at the Festival of Lights in December 2014, with the support of local press
- Developed an additional business survey.

### E EVIDENCE LOCAL NEEDS AND WISHES

- We analysed the survey results and presented our first findings at an Open Day on 31 January 2015
- Developed a contact list of residents and others interested in contributing to the project or wishing to be kept informed
- Identified key issues to take forward in five Working Groups: Community, Economy, Transport, Environment, and Blue Skies.
- Identified the need for an effective, modern strategy for Community Communication
- Engaged more than 40 further volunteers in these Working Groups to delve into issues and develop recommendations/vision (from February 2015)
- Produced interim reports for discussion and presented to the Town Meeting, 9 April 2015
- Created a Twitter stream to increase engagement
- Continued to encourage, respond to and monitor public input via Facebook, Twitter, etc.

### A AGREE AND PRIORITISE ACTIONS

- Drew together recommendations, with evidence base, and formulated Vision, Objectives and Recommendations
- Presented this Report to Town Council (to be officially received 23 July 2015).

### D DELIVER AND MONITOR THESE ACTIONS

We have been well aware since the beginning of the project that the 6-month timescale originally given to us was not sufficient to create a fully evidenced and costed Town Plan. Such plans normally take 18 months or longer. Our Plan is therefore only the first phase in a longer process that must involve both elected authorities and general public. It is our wish that V4B continue its work in helping to prepare a formal Town Plan to deliver agreed projects and to work on longer-term feasibility studies for the more aspirational projects.

We must continue to harness the community spirit and engagement achieved in recent months to deliver tangible benefit to our whole community.

It is our hope that V4B continue its work, helping to prepare more detailed plans to deliver agreed projects and working on longer-term feasibility studies for more aspirational projects.

In presenting this report, it is therefore the wish of the Vision for Beaconsfield Steering group:

- That the Town Council adopts the report as the basis for a formal Town Plan, using its findings:
  - as the basis for decision making at local authority levels
  - to inform its input to the Local Plan currently under development by South Bucks District Council (SBDC)
  - to inform the development of an Action Plan for delivery over the next 5 years and beyond
- That this document is published, and its publication advertised as widely as possible, so that Beaconsfield residents are fully informed about what has been achieved so far
- That the Town Council and V4B Steering Group meet to explore an appropriate structure for the continued existence of the V4B project, either as a separate entity such as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation or under the auspices of one of the community groups in town.
  - That we continue to collaborate in developing a formal Town Plan and Action Plan, capitalising on the valuable volunteer effort the project has mobilised
  - That together we establish fresh ways of working with and for the community in a holistic fashion, aiming to increase the number of volunteers and the range of opportunities to get involved
  - That together we establish a means of regularly communicating progress to residents
- That the Town Council looks again at the potential benefits of neighbourhood planning. Working with the community, we believe it is possible to prepare a more extensive and robust plan for the sustainable development of our town, a Neighbourhood Plan within the Localism legislation framework and in common with nearby towns.

### COMMUNICATION

A key challenge has been to establish effective communication links with the community. Although there are many media outlets for local news and opinion, Beaconsfield lacks a single focus for town news. This has meant engagement has built only slowly, although it is accelerating now. Some sectors of the community still need to be reached. This experience has led us to identify a key goal for the Town Plan: development of a community-led communication hub for the town.



## 2 PORTRAIT OF BEACONSFIELD

Beaconsfield is an attractive historic market town, highly desirable because of its close links to central London, Heathrow and the high-tech corridor along the A4/M4. It lies surrounded by fields and ancient woodland, its rural boundaries abutting the Green Belt. In town, open spaces and relics of woodland remain to green the town and most of the residential roads are lined with trees and hedgerows.

The town is situated on the historic route between London and Oxford. Already a thriving community in medieval times, with markets and fairs that still continue today, the Old Town developed its current form in the 18th century, with the rise of the coaching trade. The arrival of the railways at the start of the 20th century created a new social and economic focus in the New Town. A third focus developed to the west in Holtspur after the Second World War to meet the acute housing needs of that time. 29 houses in a distinctive 1960s style were developed at Hampden Hill, designated a Conservation Area in 2005.

The town continued to expand in following decades, with significant additions in the 1960s and 1970s in the Wattleton Road area and Seeleys Estate to the north. Development at Wilton Park – which was used during by the War Office WWII and after then MoD until 2014 and includes 86 still existing houses – will add approximately 350 homes to the town and create a fourth focus.

The town’s history is reflected in its built environment. Core streets of the Old Town remain relatively unchanged and were designated as a Conservation Area in 1969 (with amended boundaries, 2006). 20th century development has typically been of low density housing, with detached or semi-detached houses set in large front and back gardens, with higher densities in Holtspur and some quarters of both New and Old Towns. There are few blocks of flats, although these are increasing in number. There is a mix of social and private housing in all wards.



### DEMOGRAPHIC POINTERS

The latest Town Ward profiles (published by SBDC May 2015) confirm the impression of a town made up of highly educated residents in professional and managerial type jobs. Under the old ward divisions of Beaconsfield North, Beaconsfield South and Beaconsfield West, the proportion of people in professional, technical or managerial work is 68%, 65% and 58% respectively. South Bucks as a whole is one of the least socially deprived local authorities in the whole country; Beaconsfield North is in the top 10% least deprived wards in England and Beaconsfield West and South in the top 20% and 30% respectively.

Ward profiles however point to differences between the town’s communities, with affluence concentrated in the North, while in the South Ward 22.4% of housing is social housing, there is lower home ownership and 17% do not have a car or van. Housing is densest in Holtspur.

The town’s age profile, according to the most recent census, show that young and old represent a significant minority of the population, whose needs should be met in any aspiration for the town.

	Under 20	Over 65
Beaconsfield North	25%	22%
Beaconsfield South	26%	15%
Beaconsfield West	25%	18%



## Challenges

Like so many south-eastern towns, Beaconsfield is subject to intense development pressures, which threaten to erode its distinctive character. In recent years it has been regularly listed among the most expensive towns in England, and one of the most desirable. Housing pressure, traffic pressure, infrastructure pressure, all are signs of success, but all raise real concerns for the future.

Change is inevitable – Beaconsfield has never stood still. But unthinking, unplanned development can lose us the very things we value, turning us into just another commuter town. Our aim must be to find ways to halt the erosion of the distinctive physical, natural and social character which gives our town its identity and sense of place.

**Character is hard to define. It is created not just by bricks and mortar, but also by the communities we nourish.**

We know already that Beaconsfield struggles to form a coherent identity across its three communities and this may only be exacerbated by expansion to the east, with the development of Wilton Park. Our population is largely well educated and prosperous. But we know some people are much less well-off, and that to be poor in a wealthy town can be isolating. We have hundreds of volunteers working hard to support the community. But we know that our population is increasingly time-poor and disengaged. And we know our demography is changing – the population is ageing, while high house prices force out younger generations and those on lower incomes, unbalancing the social mix and making many feel estranged from this wealthy community.

All these affect our character as much as housing and traffic.

**The aim of this project is to halt the slow attrition of the town, capitalising on the will of residents to help create a vision that both preserves what we value and takes steps to change for the better.**





## 3 CONSULTATION – OVERVIEW

### SURVEY SNAPSHOT

The three surveys developed by *Vision for Beaconsfield* aimed to capture a snapshot of views from the local community, which could be explored in Working Groups.

Alison Eardley has analysed the findings and her full report is provided as Appendix A. The Chairs of the Working Groups refer to specific findings in their reports. Here we provide just a brief overview.

The surveys provide a useful snapshot of views from the local population. In addition, a great deal of engagement was undertaken with groups and individuals around the town, using a range of mechanisms such as: one-to-one meetings; drop-in days; pop-up stalls at local events; and social media and press contact.

This has greatly helped to increase the level of engagement with local people, with all information received being fed directly to the Working Groups investigating each of the themes to emerge from the surveys. We accept however that further engagement is needed to ensure that a more balanced view can be achieved, in particular to engage younger generations.

We should see ourselves, community and Council, as having begun a long-term town dialogue. Alison Eardley advises that it is normal for community activism to continue to gather pace as people begin to observe positive changes as a result of the community planning process, and it is clear from the engagement to date that there is an appetite locally for activity to expand.

### LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Our multi-channel approach aimed to maximise exposure and opportunities for local residents, employees and businesses to interact with the project. Many are now highly engaged and still sending in queries and suggestions on a daily basis.

Some tactics worked better than others. The website has been a valuable focal point for communications and a hub for overall communications, and we have connected with other local sites such as *Streetlife* and *My Beaconsfield*.

Email communications has been steadily growing and has been a very effective way in communicating with local residents. While Facebook has been less successful, the Twitter platform has proved very successful as Beaconsfield already has an active and engaged local Twitter community. The statistics are quite impressive, strengthened by serendipitous linkage with other Apps.

Late on in the project we introduced a combined text update service, which has proved an interesting new engagement medium.

### ENGAGEMENT

By the beginning of July we had:

- **18 full press articles** and **12 mentions** in print press, between January and July
- **34 online references** in other articles over the same period
- **1882 emails** with questions, suggestions, requests for information or offers of assistance
- **660 text messages** of support or questions.
- **782 unique user website visits** since we moved to the wordpress site
- **51 followers** on Facebook
- **185 followers** on Twitter  
**906** direct messages, **68662** tweet impressions
- **267 interactions** via Foursquare/Swarm. Location-based services have proved useful in driving visits to our website and Twitter account.
- **199 messages and likes** via Instagram. Another feed platform to our website and Twitter accounts.
- **1100 messages** via WhatsApp. Our text service prompted activity on this platform almost by accident!
- **170 comments back or members interacting with us** on Streetlife. We have conducted votes, chats and discussion groups across this localised platform.

Because of this high level of engagement, it has been impossible in this report to capture the breadth and depth of our community's contributions or to feature more than a handful of individual suggestions.

However, we have read and considered everything we have received and are truly grateful to everyone for taking the time to engage with us.

## SURVEY RESPONSES

In total, **92** Three Wishes responses were received from children, **522** residents completed the residents' survey (a roughly 5% return by individual or 11% return by household). **13** businesses completed the business survey.

The main survey asked respondents to offer their views on a series of statements relating to four overarching themes: Environment, Business, Community, and Transport and Infrastructure. They were also able to provide free-text comments on each theme to ensure fuller feedback.

In addition, residents were asked for their more general views about what they liked most about Beaconsfield, their biggest concerns, the one positive change they would most like to bring about, and if there was anything else they wished to comment on. The findings are as summarised here and fully analysed in Alison Eardley's Report (*App. A*).

### WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEACONSFIELD?

#### The top five were

- A great location: easy access to London, transport links and the countryside
- The friendliness of the community and feeling of safety
- Its attractiveness in terms of its market town size and the character of its buildings
- The greenness of the town and its surrounds
- The local facilities – shops, restaurants and other amenities

*"It's small enough to feel like a real community but there are lots of different things to do and it is close to London"*

*"It is my Home Town"*



### WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CONCERN ABOUT BEACONSFIELD?

The most frequently quoted concerns were all interlinked and related to anxiety around growth of the town and its impact on housing mix and character, infrastructure and community spirit.

*"If it gets too big it will lose its charm. It is unique and one day it may be just another place."*



### IF YOU COULD BRING ABOUT ONE POSITIVE CHANGE TO BEACONSFIELD WHAT WOULD IT BE?

#### The top responses were:

- Solving the car parking problem
- Creating more community facilities
- Improving access to sport and leisure
- Reducing traffic congestion
- Harnessing community action
- Having input in the planning of the town
- Improving walking and cycling opportunities
- Greening the town
- Supporting a more vibrant town centre

Some of the innovative suggestions included: link Old and New Town by tram or bus; a town museum; bringing together sports in one new location; a theatre; a community choir; a new town clock; and a Happiness Index .

*"One positive change? For the town as a whole to appreciate how lucky we are to live here and channel that collective appreciation into something good"*

### WHAT DO OUR CHILDREN WANT?

#### Top of their wishlists:

- Swimming Pool
- Cinema
- Indoor leisure/play centre
- Outdoor playgrounds
- A bigger park/green spaces
- More toy and games shops
- Football pitches for everyone
- Skate park
- Youth club
- Festivals and family events

## 4 ASSESSING THE HEALTH OF OUR TOWN – SWOT AND PESTEL ANALYSES

Our survey and consultation results, combined with information from Working Groups and consultees, allowed us to develop two analyses of the current state of the town, its strengths and vulnerabilities, and the external influences on it. We provide sketch summaries here. The full analyses can be found in *Appendix D*.

### SWOT ANALYSIS (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)

#### STRENGTHS

Our town is ideally situated to access the employment and cultural activities of London, whilst enjoying a pleasant rural setting close to Burnham Beeches and Chilterns AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), with excellent transport links further afield. Our residents are generally prosperous and well-educated. There is a wide variety of sports, specific interest groups and a thriving faith community. Cultural events such as the Festival of Lights and Midsummer Fayre draw the community together at certain times. We have a beautiful historic quarter, protected as a Conservation Area, and an internationally renowned Model Village at Bekonscot, of which residents are rightly proud. Local community initiatives such as the development of Holtspur Park and the town Nature Reserve volunteers show how we can improve the local environment for residents.

#### WEAKNESSES

The town is fragmented, with Old and New Towns, Holtspur and perhaps future Wilton Park residents identifying more with themselves than the wider town. A feeling of a lack of community cohesion is exacerbated by the absence of central common facilities such as a town park, community centre, arts or sports centres. The popularity of the town continues to promote residential expansion. This strains infrastructure in general; educational places, health and road traffic in particular. Young adults cannot afford to set up home here. Weekday, commuter and office parking is a blight on the Old Town Ends and streets around the station. Working age families are increasingly asset rich but time-poor making it hard to recruit volunteers to clubs and committees. Disillusion with local democracy contributes to lack of community engagement.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

The development of Wilton Park offers potential of access to land closed for generations, provides valuable housing and could add something new and exciting to our community assets. A relief road across this land and beyond to A355 should improve congestion currently clogging the town. Recent Localism legislation offers opportunities for more local engagement. The current revision of the Local Plan allows a chance to re-evaluate adjacent Greenbelt for the benefit of the whole community. Creative use of social media and the Internet would improve community cohesion, awareness of clubs, societies and town events, reaching younger age groups more effectively. Engaging our youth through a youth council or similar group would help add to wider decision making. Community facilities should be reviewed for capacity, appropriateness and repurposing.

#### THREATS

The sustainability of our high street is under threat largely from changing shopping habits; local factors include lack of footfall because parking is expensive or not available, and high business rates particularly affect small independent shops and businesses. Continuing in-filling and incremental, insensitive development changes character and risks straining infrastructure to breaking point. Water, sewage, power, telephone, traffic, education and health services all need holistic plans for the medium and long term. Without proper planning, Wilton Park may be poorly integrated. HS2 construction will create further traffic congestion and noise, strengthening the need for a relief road. We become more isolationist behind gates and fences, not looking out for our neighbours and ignoring sections of our town. Loss of community spirit leads to loss of more voluntary cultural and social organisations.

**PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental) External influences**

**POLITICAL**

2015-2020 will see further restraint in public spending to reduce the deficit. This will permeate into County, District and Parish budgets and psyche. The drive for efficiency and effectiveness may give rise to a fresh review of the three tier local government structure in Bucks at District level in particular. The dominance of a single party at all levels of government affecting the town can be both a positive and negative influence for the town. Localism will be a continuing policy trend offering opportunities for greater local autonomy and engagement.

**ECONOMIC**

The local jobs market is strong with low unemployment levels in the town. However, lower paid jobs will become increasingly unattractive because of high travel costs and congestion, and high cost of housing means key workers become increasingly difficult to attract. Sustainability of the High Street is in question and the loss of business rate revenues a potential concern. Alternative revenue sources such as high parking charges adversely affect local business. Energy price trends affect commuting, shopping, and recreational behaviours. A disproportionate rise in rail costs would challenge the town's historic prominence as a dormitory town for London.

**SOCIAL**

The town has an older age profile than many and that trend – and net migration – is set to continue. Diversity is slowly increasing. Traditional faith groups remain strong but under pressure. Working population time poor. Internet, social media and anywhere technology is affecting behaviours in all ages. Fear of crime and attitudes to risk affect parenting habits and the willingness of volunteers and organisations to get involved to make things happen. Increasing social divide, with pockets of relative poverty often invisible in a wealthy town.

**TECHNOLOGICAL**

The Internet, social media and anywhere access is transforming our lives, rendering some industries and businesses obsolete and creating others. A cashless society is nearer than ever. Mobile technology makes it easier to find a restaurant, get to a destination or stay in contact. High speed broadband access to all properties in the town would help businesses to thrive and residents to participate fully in the community. Alternative fuels promise cheaper and less polluting transport opportunities.

**ENVIRONMENTAL**

Green spaces under pressure with high demand for housing. Birth rates and net migration will continue to put pressure on infrastructure capacities: housing, water, sewerage, power, roads, rail, waste disposal etc. Climate change will bring greater natural extremes and directives to counter global warming will have increasing impact on Local Authorities and residents. Reducing dependence on fossil fuels is a continuing trend that will impact in the long term. Emphasis will increase on recycling, reusing and upcycling, reducing waste and water usage. HS2 will have an environmental and social impact on the area, particularly during construction.

**LEGAL**

Changes to planning regulations (eg the duty on developers to build affordable housing) and relaxation of regulations to release more brownfield, and in the future possibly greenbelt, sites will put the town under more pressure. Health and safety, equality and disability, data protection and other legislation continue to affect our rights and responsibilities, both in employment and as volunteers in the community.

## 4 A VISION FOR BEACONSFIELD

In the following chart, we have sought to encapsulate our vision for the town’s future, both as a whole and in relation to the themes of our different Working Groups.





## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The very diverse investigations of our Working Groups have resulted in a comprehensive and wide-ranging set of recommendations. **In the summary chapters from the Working Groups that follow, these recommendations are made in the context of the research and findings. It is important to read these to understand our thinking.**

Some recommendations are the direct concern of the Town Council, working with other local authorities. Others can be achieved through concerted voluntary community action, with the Town Council acting as champion and sponsor.

We have identified many small as well as larger projects that can be delivered using a combination of local goodwill, time and commitment, and with funding either via third party organisations or fundraising with Town Council support.

The recommendations, if adopted, will need to be worked up into more detailed plans for investigation and delivery.

We recognise the tension that exists between acting to preserve our town's semi-rural character and accepting that growth and change is inevitable. At times, our own views diverge on the way forward. We have sought to resolve this in our recommendations by:

- Advocating more sensitive residential development at a scale that respects our built and green heritage and social mix
- Advocating the development of community spaces to enrich our town's social and cultural life, rather than merely increasing our housing stock.
- Advocating the preservation of our green boundaries as key to the town's character where those boundaries preserve our identity as a distinct town and protect us from urban sprawl.
- Indicating areas of uncertainty and debate, which merit Further discussion with the community.

## TRANSPORT, TRAFFIC AND PARKING

**Objective T1 To develop a coherent, holistic strategy for parking across town, to meet the needs of different sectors and balance the need for all-day and short-term parking**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That a Parking subcommittee of the Town Council should be established immediately to develop a coherent, town-wide strategy for parking. The committee should:
  - review our findings as part of its deliberations
  - continue to use the resources of V4B and other relevant bodies, consulting with community and business groups
  - engage actively with all sectors of the community and commuters in developing solutions
  - publish a town-wide strategy and Action Plan to an agreed timetable, addressing short, medium and long-term solutions
  - Conduct an annual review to stay on top of this important issue and keep the public informed.
2. That those working in the town should be offered a reduced price season ticket for Council car parks, provided capacity has been increased.
3. That existing car parks should be equipped with smart number plate readers to allow free parking for the first hour and for reduced price season ticket holders.

**Objective T2 To encourage more walking and cycling in town with a longterm view to increase the health of residents and decrease the number of car journeys made**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

4. That the Town Council continues its support for the implementation of the Beaconsfield Cycling Action Plan Action Group, including working with local businesses as sponsors/funders for cycle racks
5. That the conflict arising between the use of cycle lanes, eg in Burke's Road, and the road's use for free parking, is addressed
6. That, to reduce the problem of parked vehicles blocking the cycle lanes introduced in Burkes Road and elsewhere, some level of parking restriction should be considered
7. That the bridge across the railway on Station Road should be made safer by the erection of a handrail
8. That consideration is given to installing a sign near all schools indicating that a 20mph speed limit applies when lights are flashing.

**Objective T3 To develop flexible public transport to serve the town and offer an alternative to the car for all-day parkers and those shopping in town**

### RECOMMENDATION

9. That further investigations are carried out into the feasibility of developing a sustainable hopper bus service, identifying partners, operators and sources of funding.



**Objective T4 To reduce congestion in and through town for the benefit of commuters and residents, and to ensure that:**

- the proposed relief road meets the needs of the town to reduce congestion
- safety for other road users, especially coming to and from Wilton Park, is properly considered.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

10. That the Town Council actively champions the needs of town residents, consults with and keeps them fully informed of planning progress for better traffic flow.

**ENVIRONMENT: NATURAL AND BUILT**

**Objective E1 To encourage civic pride in Beaconsfield**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That a 'Pride in Beaconsfield' Charter is created, encouraging everyone to take pride in their frontage to the curb, be they commercial or residential owners
2. That spending on maintenance and gardeners is increased to enhance our green spaces and main areas and routes into the town: possibly also raising funds through sponsorship and crowdfunding
3. That residents and voluntary groups are empowered and encouraged to help with maintenance and environmental enhancement activities, including fundraising
4. That a community arts policy framework is developed to encourage art into our public spaces
5. That more research is carried out into innovative projects to encourage greater awareness of how we can all help keep our town welcoming and litter free
6. That where street furniture and public utility estates (buildings, cables and pipes and signs) are inadequately maintained this should be drawn to the attention of the relevant owner or authority
7. That 'grasscrete' be considered for use where heavy vehicles routinely damage grass pavement areas.

**Objective E2 To enrich the main routes into town for the benefit of people and wildlife**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

8. That community and Council work together to:
  - plant wild flowers or bulbs along our main 'Green Fingers' where appropriate
  - undertake a tree planting scheme across town with a commitment to plant 100 trees in 5 years, to enhance visual impact and create biodiversity
  - place park benches along the routes for the benefit of walkers

11. That, to reduce the impact on the town centre, the derestriction of Ledborough Lane is considered, with improvements to the junctions at either end
12. That local consultations are held to ensure residents and road users are able to have their say on the current proposals
13. That safety issues are properly addressed, particularly with regard to links across the A355 and relief road to and from Wilton Park, and near the schools.

9. That proper accessibility for push and wheelchairs is ensured along all main routes, on at least one side of the road, renovating paths around large trees where necessary
10. That the Wilton Park development is linked to the New Town via a green foot/cycle path

**Objective E3 To further develop our green spaces for the benefit of townspeople, visitors and wildlife and protecting our green boundaries**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

11. That the Town Council continues to support its significant natural habitat open spaces, maintaining them for the benefit of wildlife and residents
12. That the Town Council continues to support the development of our open spaces to provide added opportunities for the young to socialise, play and enjoy nature
13. That potential locations for a new playground for the New Town are identified and a project group set up to pursue feasibility and possible funding
14. That a task force is set up to investigate the feasibility of planting a community orchard in the town, ideally located near our main cluster of schools.
15. That every effort is made to protect greenbelt land and other green spaces around the town
16. That Beaconsfield's trees are further safeguarded by reviewing individual and area TPOs and landscape succession. The special importance of ancient woodlands (Walkwood, Ledborough Wood and Browns Wood) should be noted.



**Objective E4 To support and guide future development within a clear framework, so the town’s character is not lost in the drive to provide more housing**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

17. That all developers should be required to provide more information about the surrounding properties in planning applications for new construction and or large extensions, to ensure they are of an appropriate scale and form. This should be shown in elevations and in a *three dimensional drawing* of the site and the surrounding properties.
18. That when redevelopment occurs, the site should support enough vegetation to be in keeping with the area, particularly in maintaining a green streetscape
19. That the Town Council website should include a page for developers of new and existing buildings, giving guidance notes, links to key planning documents and any supplementary information sought.
20. That the Town Council should review all known infrastructure issues and draw up an Action Plan for the

responsible authorities to tackle them, and ensure new developments do not negatively impact on surrounding neighbours, or provide mitigation.

21. That the Town Council, in conjunction with other authorities as necessary, ensures that new developments have adequate physical infrastructure and support for health, education and recreational needs
22. That the Town Council move to develop its own Neighbourhood Plan to strengthen its position within the planning framework, seeking support from the community.

**Objective E5 To ensure the town continues to provide a diversity of housing to maintain the diversity of our community**

23. That the Town Council continues to be proactive in ensuring that the town itself benefits fully from the requirement for larger-scale developers to develop 40% affordable housing.

**LOCAL ECONOMY AND TOURISM**

*(NB: Objective LE1 on parking is covered by recommendations in Transport section)*

**Objective LE2 To support and grow the independent retail sector through the creation of a loyalty scheme and business directory and connect commerce and community via a virtual communication hub**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That businesses, Council and V4B members should work together to develop a sustainable ‘Think local, buy Local’ strategy and encourage local buy-in
2. That additional research should be carried out on ways to help our high street and a plan of action proposed, including a specific plan for Old Town shops
3. That while Bucks Business First and other networks should be promoted, the needs of businesses should also be addressed in the plans for a virtual communication hub, building a local directory to link retail and customers and to help businesses to network
4. That the feasibility of installing (interactive) town maps to direct people to local retail and other businesses and attractions, should be investigated.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

5. That a speedy solution to Bekonscot’s parking problems be found – recognising that the Town Council is already consulting on this, but that innovative short-term parking solutions are also needed
6. That an initiative is supported to develop town map and walking routes leaflets/maps linking places of historic and literary importance in our town and to encourage exploration of our green surroundings.
7. That the voluntary sector is encouraged to develop ideas for an additional town cultural festival, bringing benefit to the local economy.

**Objective LE4 To revive the Old Town market as an important amenity for residents and a valuable launchpad for new businesses**

**RECOMMENDATION**

8. That a coherent strategy is developed to revive and sustain the market, involving all stakeholders (Hall Barn, SBDC, the Town Council and V4B) to include:
  - Creation of a professionally created marketing campaign
  - Relaunch with special events and editorial,
  - Online support and publicity via a communications hub
  - Increasing signage to attract customers
  - Encouragement for more start-up businesses to start at the market through special rates/promotions.

**Objective LE3 To ensure the survival and restoration to good health of the town’s key attraction, and to explore other ways of increasing the town’s tourism offer**

## COMMUNITY AND LEISURE

**Objective C1 To increase outdoor and indoor sports provision for all ages, and to maximise the benefit of what already exists in town**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That we encourage the creation of a consortium of schools with swimming pools to promote greater community use
2. That a dedicated taskforce is set up to investigate the feasibility of a multi-use sports facility including swimming facilities, to be managed by a community non-profit organisation
3. That the Town Council works to ensure the inclusion of other sporting facilities in addition to football is ensured in the development of Wilton Park
4. That the Town Council re-opens an exploration of the siting of a skate park within Beaconsfield.

**Objective C2 To enrich the cultural life of the town through the provision of better facilities for the arts, performance and film**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

5. That greater community use of the cinema at the NFTS is encouraged
6. That a working group is set up to explore options for the establishment of a new Arts Centre for Beaconsfield. Conversations should include discussing the possibility of a partnership with a local community group.

**Objective C3 To create a vibrant central locus for the town community to meet**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

7. That a full audit of community facilities be carried out and closer co-collaboration and streamlining of function is encouraged
8. That community groups are encouraged to collaborate and perhaps coalesce where appropriate, to make the most of the town's volunteer capacity.
9. That a working group is set up to explore the feasibility of creating a central community Hub in Beaconsfield, with the Town Hall being the preferred option
10. That sufficient 'mini-hubs' are identified and supported in key locations in the town.



**Objective C4 To improve provision for the town's youth**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

11. That the Curzon Centre and Holtspur Youth Club work together to assess the need for youth projects in town and carry out a survey with help of interested stakeholders.

**Objective C5 To build a town that engages with, benefits from and cares for its older generation**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

12. That the Bucks County Council initiative *Prevention Matters* be promoted
13. That the local Community Service Worker is supported by doctors' surgeries, community groups and other agencies working with the old
14. That the Alzheimers' Society is encouraged and supported to make Beaconsfield a dementia-friendly community, and to achieve the deployment of an Admiral Nurse for the area
15. That all information for those without access to the Internet is well maintained in central physical hubs.

**Objective C6 To encourage the further engagement of town residents and stakeholders in the future of the town**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

16. That an appropriate structure for the continued existence of the *Vision for Beaconsfield* project is explored, either as a separate entity such as a CIO or under the auspices of one of the community groups in town.
17. That the membership of the Beaconsfield Local Area Form is expanded to enable greater communication between councillors and community
18. That the Town Council consult on the local precept
19. That a Youth Council is created inviting nominees from secondary schools and youth groups.

**Objective C7 To establish a sustainable communication portal that connects, informs and encourages community engagement across town**

### RECOMMENDATIONS

20. That V4B, liaising with the Town Council, continues its investigations into a sustainable model for a virtual communications portal, bringing together key stakeholders and surveying town opinion to define the right model for our town and prepare an Action Plan for its implementation.



# SUPPORTING SUMMARIES

## WORKING GROUP REPORTS

The following pages, which complete this Report, comprise the Summary Reports of the four main Working Groups.

- A Transport, Traffic and Parking**
- B Environment: Natural and Built**
- C Local Economy and Tourism**
- D Community and Leisure, with a special report of virtual communication**

Each Working Group's report is supported by a number of Appendices, provided as separate documents. These give further research information and explore some of the innovative concepts proposed.

Contributions from the wide-ranging **Blues Skies Working Group** have been integrated into these reports as appropriate, A full Report for this group's work can be found as Appendix B.

Alison Eardley's detailed **Summary Report on the Survey Findings** can be found as Appendix A.



# A TRANSPORT, TRAFFIC & PARKING WORKING GROUP SUMMARY REPORT

**Chair:** Douglas Butterfield

**Members:** Peter Sanders, Sue Finlay, Philip and Marina Smith, Barbara Firman, Roy Foster (Town Councillor), Malcolm Hann, Matt Holder, John Pell

**Other contributors/consultees:** Belinda Avery, Beaconsfield Cycle Path Action Group; Steve Kenton, Transport for Bucks; Tim Thurley, Transport Development, South Bucks District Council; Alison Bailey, Heart of Bucks; Catherine Miller, Chiltern Railways

**Making movement around town easier, safer and accessible to all**

**We want Beaconsfield to be a safe and accessible town for those who live, work or play here, a friendly town for pedestrians, cyclists and disabled people, with traffic free-flowing and uncongested.**

## INTRODUCTION

Respondents to our town survey registered high levels of concern about the impact of car traffic throughout the town: the growing congestion of through routes; the lack of parking; and the challenge facing walkers and cyclists in moving safely around the town.

Parking was the number one issue raised and attracted the most comments. In this, Beaconsfield is neither alone, nor even unusual. The threat to many town centres from inadequate parking facilities for shoppers and businesses is clearly expressed in the 2013 Report ‘Re-Think! Parking on the High Street: Guidance on Parking Provision in Town and City Centres’:

*“A number of factors have come together to create an almost perfect storm which prohibits access to traditional urban centres for car users. The majority of these urban centres pre-date the existence of cars and common car ownership. They are not purpose-built to accommodate the car and their density and high concentration of land use along with multiple land ownership make them difficult and expensive to adapt...”*

*This has worked in parallel with other societal and economic changes that have seen the town centre fall out of favour with many consumers, who now have the choice to spend their time and money elsewhere.”*

[http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/Re-thinking\\_Car\\_Parking.pdf](http://www.britishparking.co.uk/write/Documents/Re-thinking_Car_Parking.pdf)

Other issues that emerged from the consultation included the poor state of pavements and overhangs, inconsiderate parking especially in the Old Town, the lack of public transport connecting different parts of town, congestion and the need for a relief road to divert through-traffic from the town centres.

The working group set out to examine these concerns in some detail, calling on members’ expertise to guide us and holding meetings with outside bodies and experts. We recognise that much work is already underway at Town, District and County Council levels to address key transport issues, and that they have had many useful discussions.

This section provides a summary of our deliberations and a series of recommendations. Our recommendations are designed to support the development and implementation of a coherent overall strategy for the town for the future.

We believe that the engagement of the community is essential in gaining buy-in to measures that will have their own impact on the town, and where the needs of different sectors may conflict.

The following pages look at:

1. Parking
2. Cycling and walking
3. Public transport
4. Congestion, the A355 and relief road

We received further input from the Blue Skies Working Group, who looked at ‘shared space’ models for traffic management.

Appendices T1–T4 provide detailed information in support of these summaries, as well as useful links to other projects, and details of bodies and individuals consulted. The Local Economy Working Group also conducted a comparative survey of public car park charges in the area (Appendix LE1).





## 1. PARKING

**Objective T1** To develop a coherent, holistic strategy for parking across the town, to meet the needs of different sectors and balance the need for all-day and short-term parking

### Summary of issues raised in surveys

Our surveys identified the following issues, many of which have been the subject of debate for years:

- A shortage of free or cheap parking in town, high public carpark charges for short stay parking, and commuters and workers occupying free spaces, all make it difficult for both shoppers and businesses
- The Old Town in particular is extremely difficult to park in, which deters many from going there at all. Retail businesses suffer as a consequence.
- Parking near to schools (eg along Wattleton and Maxwell Roads) is mentioned as being particularly dangerous at peak times.
- Other roads mentioned include Gregories Road and Burkes Road, with parked cars creating dangers for other road users, including pedestrians and cyclists.

Some specific solutions were proposed by respondents:

- A number of comments were made about the need to enforce existing parking restrictions, by re-introducing traffic wardens.
- Drawing on examples of other towns, several people argued for free or cheap parking for 30-60 minutes, varying the parking time restrictions on roads designed to prevent commuter parking as in Gerrards Cross; or offering more residents free parking areas where non-residents pay to park, as in Hillingdon.
- Having an open link to parking enforcement officers would help everyone 'police' parking in the town. Bad parking is prolific and can lead to dangerous situations for pedestrians and road users. Many have posted Twitter pictures of examples of obstructions and poor parking by drivers.
- With clearer road markings in the Old Town (the Blue Sky group has suggested coloured paving stones) and some physical barriers incorporated, some dangerous parking can be reduced.

**The common land problem** It is widely recognised that the existence of common land in the Old Town makes 'normal' parking solutions unworkable and that it has ripple effects into the New Town. Proposals to find a way to solve the problem have repeatedly been thwarted. A land swap proposal, creating limited time parking bays to help retail, was put forward a few years ago but rejected following public consultation. The group was divided over whether this should be reconsidered, but thought it was unlikely to be successful because it is no longer supported by SBDC.

However we must finally resolve this problem to bring in a more sensible parking regime, so we need to find more creative

solutions. New Bye Laws need to be passed, and we recommend further consideration is given to this. We also feel that laws designed for grazing animals need to be updated!

### RESEARCH – PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Extensive on-the-ground research into the whole town's parking problems resulted in a series of detailed reports. The report findings are summarised below.

**Parking Issues in the New Town** (Appendix T1) gives the background and history of parking availability in the New Town, with a detailed analysis of the shortage of short-term and long-term parking. Car parking charges at the station are high at £960 pa for season ticket holders, and long-term parking in the three SBDC New Town car parks is too expensive for less well-paid workers. Short stay charges are also considered a deterrent to shoppers. This contributes to the 'blocking' of free roadside parking within walking distance of the station, shops and offices – as well as to all-day parking in the Old Town by commuters.

**Parking Issues in the Old Town** (Appendix T2) summarises the background to the current parking problems in the Old Town and considers 15 different responses, including a land swap for the common land in the Old Town currently used for roadside parking, which cannot be regulated.

Both reports conclude that there is little or no spare parking capacity in town at many times of the week, particularly during working and opening hours on weekdays. The situation is likely to become worse once Wilton Park is fully developed and populated, and the railway is extended to Oxford in 2016. A whole town approach is urgently needed.

A third report, **Provision of Additional Car Parking in Beaconsfield Old and New Towns** (Appendix T3) therefore explores some possible solutions, assessing the eight locations identified as worthy of further consideration to provide further parking:

- Old A40 near Pyebush roundabout
- Wilton Park
- Outer reaches of cricket ground
- West side of Windsor End towards Hall Barn wall
- Rugby Club
- Land on southern side of A40 behind York House
- Geary's Piece and Meadow opp. BP petrol station on A40
- Parkway strip north of A40, next to Walkwood Rise
- Land between A40 and M40 opposite Harvester in Holtspur

Geary's Piece and Meadow was later recommended by the Environment Working Group, although there was some disagreement about its suitability.



The report usefully concludes:

*‘Within the four ends of the Old Town there is already a major issue with the lack of parking spaces and this will get progressively worse over the years. It is important that one or more of the alternatives should be progressed to alleviate the problems of parking in the Old Town. However drivers are currently parking free-of-charge here. Encouragement would be required to divert them from always doing so, such as good signage (for out-of-town visitors) or free/low cost parking (for regular workers in the town). Over time a relief car park must be welcomed and used.’*

Regarding parking capacity in the New Town, the report confirms that there is:

- Limited spare capacity in council car parks
- Limited spare capacity at Beaconsfield station
- Limited spare capacity for parking in streets without parking regulations.

It is important that each is addressed to alleviate the problems of parking in the New Town. Drivers are walking up to 1.1km from a free parking space, taking 10 minutes each morning and evening. The maximum distance will continue to increase over time. For those working in the town we therefore recommend a reduced price season ticket for Council car parks, provided capacity has been increased. The installation of number plate recognition would assist this and also permit a scheme of free hour parking, which could provide a workable solution for the school drop, increase access to shops and help with the free flow of traffic.

### CONSULTATIONS WITH OTHER BODIES ON PARKING

In the course of our research, we have also held useful discussions with Local Authority departments involved with transport issues for Beaconsfield, and with Chiltern Railways.

Members of South Bucks District Council have advised they will consider the provision of a new multi-storey car park in the New Town and we know this is under active consideration by the Town Council. Options include the current Waitrose Car Park, Alton’s car park behind Cardain House. There is however some resistance to such construction on aesthetic grounds.

Chilterns Railway recently completed a feasibility study addressing the extension of the existing decks of the multi-storey car park, but concluded that the project would not meet the criteria for a their financial business case. They stated to us that if there is any third-party funding the situation would of course be more positive, and construction here might be a less aesthetically intrusive solution.

Bucks County Council undertook a Beaconsfield Waiting Restrictions Formal Consultation through the BCC website, (closing date 25 June 2015). We were provided with a set of large-scale maps showing the location of current waiting restrictions. We are concerned that the consultation was poorly advertised and residents found the document difficult to locate. We urge the Town Council to make the views of residents better known.

### GATEWAY PARKING

if no sites nearer to the centre of the Old or New Towns can be found, further consideration needs to be given to the sites identified above. Any of these options, if developed into all day parking facilities, could function as Gateway Car Parks. If linked to the centres via a free or cheap bus service, such car parks could serve the needs of those working in local offices or commuting and those using the town to shop.

Varied opinions have been expressed about their feasibility. However, they are not felt to be viable if there were charges for parking and the bus service while free parking in the Old Town continues, or if the charges are higher than parking in the New Town. However, we believe this concept is still worth consideration.

In town, free parking is always more preferred than paid parking, but that should not prevent us exploring the option of exploring charged parking – when free parking is full people will pay to park. Incentives to use outlying car parks would for example be increased if parking charges or restrictions could be introduced in the Old Town to reduce the severe parking stress that is choking its businesses. (This is a new variation of the land swap proposal which has already been rejected.)

There are relevant examples of projects in other towns to tackle lack of parking space. ‘In-Town Parking: What Works? Innovative Practices in Parking Provision’ published by the Association of Town and City Management gives an example of a project in Rugby which encouraged people to park out of town in gateway car parks for free, with retailers being able to give free parking vouchers to their customers.

[www.atcm.org/programmes/thought\\_leadership\\_research/carparkingwhatworks](http://www.atcm.org/programmes/thought_leadership_research/carparkingwhatworks)

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That a Parking subcommittee of the Town Council should be immediately established to develop a coherent, town-wide strategy for parking. The committee should:
  - review our findings as part of its deliberations
  - continue to use the resources of V4B and other relevant bodies, consulting with community and business groups
  - engage actively with all sectors of the community and commuters in developing solutions
  - publish a town-wide strategy and Action Plan to an agreed timetable, addressing short, medium and long-term solutions
  - conduct an annual review to stay on top of this important issue and keep the public informed.
2. That those working in the town should be offered a reduced price season ticket for Council car parks, provided that capacity has been increased.
3. That existing car parks should be equipped with smart number plate readers to allow free parking for the first hour and for reduced price season ticket holders.

## 2 CYCLING AND WALKING IN THE TOWN

**Objective T2 To encourage more walking and cycling in town with a long term view to increase the health of residents, and decrease the number of car journeys through town**

### SUMMARY OF ISSUES RAISED IN THE SURVEY

Cycling and walking are seen still as dangerous on some roads, with some calling for 20mph speed limits. Cars parked on dropped kerbs block the safe movement of pedestrians, push chairs, wheelchairs and mobility vehicles. Burkes Road and Holtspur were flagged numerous times in relation to cycling, with many suggesting that the cycling lanes were pretty much unusable for cyclists because of car users parking in the lanes.

A number of respondents mentioned the overuse of markings and paint on the roads, which is spoiling the character of the town. Others felt that cycleways and footpaths were not signposted clearly enough, meaning that people do not know they are there.

Many are more optimistic and want more done, in particular calling for greater connections between cycle lanes, more investment in public rights of way, and the installation of new family cycle tracks in local woodlands and cycle racks in town.

### GETTING OUT OF OUR CARS

The Infrastructure Bill become law in February 2015, making the Secretary of State for Transport responsible for setting out a strategy for cycling and walking infrastructure and the funding provided to meet it. Our own overall aim is to encourage more people to get out of their cars. To this end, we see initiatives such ‘walk to school’ days for schools as worth extending. We also see value in promoting walking and cycling routes with maps and on social media, an option which is explored in the Workign Groo Report on the Local Economy..

### CYCLING IN TOWN

The Beaconsfield Cycle Paths Action Group (BCPAG [www.beaconsfield-cycle-pathsactiongroup.org.uk](http://www.beaconsfield-cycle-pathsactiongroup.org.uk)) has led the way in developing cycling routes through the town. In May 2012, they conducted a survey to monitor public opinion on the cycle paths initiative in the town. The survey got responses from 42 respondents, all of whom were in favour of a cycle network in Beaconsfield. From this, the group constructed a full and aspirational proposal. Cycling in the town would be encouraged by safe dedicated cycle paths, more bike racks, cycle paths off the main roads, improvement in cycle paths at junctions, safer roads, reduced speed limits, and permission for cycling on pavements. The first route, connecting Holtspur and the railway station, was developed by BCC with Sustrans and Chiltern Railways in 2014.

The seven Beaconsfield schools have produced travel plans, and these, combined with the research and findings of BCPAG, have enabled the group to create useful ‘cluster analyses’ showing demographic data of where Beaconsfield schoolchildren live in relation to schools.

Some proposed routes use existing footpaths, which would not entail significant adaptation to the current road structure in town. We support these proposed cycle paths, which have been well researched. We also support the proposal of the BCPAG that local authorities make use of their data in planning the extension of cycle pathways. We note that Bucks CC contractors, Jacobs, undertook an extensive review of these routes in Spring 2015.

However, there can be problems with implementation. While we support the objectives of the cycle lanes introduced in Burkes Road and elsewhere, we echo the view that in practice they have led to confusion.

To encourage more cycling, BCPAG also suggests a ‘quick fix’ to install more aesthetically pleasing cycle racks, working with local trades and businesses. BCPAG has some limited funds which it wishes to spend on this project with the assistance of the local authorities.

The group would also like to promote 20mph traffic calming restrictions throughout the town to increase safety. We consider this below.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

4. That the Town Council continues its support for the implementation of the BCPAG plan, including working with local businesses as sponsors/funders for cycle racks.
5. That the conflict between the use of the current cycle lanes, eg in Burkes Road, and the road’s use for free parking be resolved.

### WALKING IN TOWN

The experience of pedestrians, wheelchair and mobility scooter users would be improved if more action were taken to ensure that residents cut back hedges which overhang pavements. Pavement maintenance is also necessary and an audit should be undertaken to ensure the number of dropped kerbs are maximised. Street lighting should be adequate to ensure safety.

**Pedestrian/cyclist bridge** We considered a proposal that the railway bridge in the New Town needs a new footbridge/cycle bridge on the east side so that road lanes can be widened, while crossing for cyclists and pedestrians is made safer. This issue was raised in the Town Meeting held in the Town Hall on 9 April 2015.

We received a response from Transport for Bucks (TfB) rejecting the proposal. They consider that available funding should be first directed to sites which suffer a poor personal injury collision record, based upon casualty data provided by Thames Valley Police. In the past five years there have been no reported collisions causing injury at Station Road with either cars, pedestrians or cyclists travelling on the bridge.

Consequently TfB cannot give priority to funding a separate footbridge. We felt that we had to accept this response. However, we believe that the safety concerns are important, and a simple rail along the existing pavement edge (as in Henley) would protect pedestrians and prevent them falling into the path of oncoming vehicles.

**ROAD SAFETY: SPEED LIMITS**

The Beaconsfield Cycle Paths Action Group would like to promote 20mph traffic calming restrictions throughout the town. We have looked at where this would make travel safer for cyclists, pedestrians and drivers, but consider that it is only appropriate in special circumstances, for example near schools.

A 20mph speed limit has already been introduced near the schools in Wattleton Road. This is fully justified during those periods when schoolchildren are at risk from the traffic. At other times, however, it acts as a constraint to the flow of traffic, causing unnecessary congestion. A flexible system with flashing sign is being introduced at several locations in the country and we believe this is worth consideration. We note higher costs are involved.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6. That the bridge across the railway be made safer for pedestrians by the erection of a handrail based in the parapet on either side of the bridge and/or on the raised low level barrier between road and footpath.
- 7. That consideration is given to installing a sign near all schools indicating that a 20mph speed limit applies when lights are flashing.

**SHARED SPACE**

The Blue Skies Working Group looked into the concept of ‘shared space’ – where roads and pavements are amalgamated and markings removed – as a solution to balance the needs of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.

Such schemes often lead, surprisingly, to improvements in traffic flow. In London, South Kensington has been transformed around the museums and tube station by a shared space scheme along Exhibition Road. In the town of Poynton a major intersection in the middle of town was changed from a highly controlled to a free, shared space with remarkable results. This radical solution would obviously need much more research and consultation. But it could offer an innovative way in the future to redress the balance between road users - and perhaps improve behaviour!

**3 PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

**Objective T3 To develop flexible public transport to serve the town and offer an alternative to the car for all-day parkers and those shopping in town**

**EVIDENCE FROM SURVEY**

The clear message from our survey is that local people are heavily dependent on cars and only some wish to find ways to reduce this. Public transport attracted 25 comments in all, with 6 suggesting a local bus to connect different parts of the town. Free electric buses or trams around the town, and a shuttle bus between the Old and New Towns, were suggested.

Public buses are well used in the morning and the evening, particularly during the week in term time, but are lightly used during the day and at weekends and school holidays.

The A40 bus between Wycombe and Heathrow is used by some commuters working in Uxbridge and Heathrow. Along with travellers to the airport they can leave their cars all day for free, either in Holtspur or in the Old Town. This adds further to the Old Town parking problems.

The current bus programme is subsidised by the Government so depends on the availability of public finances and the level of local demand. If free bus passes were stopped, demand particularly during the day would be reduced.

All buses currently serving the town have a limited timetable and do not provide a truly local service. We therefore investigated the possibility of introducing a Hopper bus to provide access to the centre of Beaconsfield for those less mobile, without their own transport, or living further out in the surrounding villages.

**HOPPER BUS SCHEME**

Tesco’s in Loudwater runs a community bus on a few days during the week, which allows residents from Holtspur and the Wooburn Green area to shop at their store. This idea would be worthwhile considering for Beaconsfield, bringing in Sainsbury’s or Waitrose as sponsors, with the Town Council offering a subsidy (we recognise that the last would be more than challenging to deliver).

A community bus or Hopper Bus scheme could run between the outlying villages around Beaconsfield such as Holtspur, Knotty Green, Wilton Park, Wooburn Green, Jordans, Seer Green and Hedgerley – connecting with the supermarkets in the town, and linking future gateway car parks and the railway station. A community bus service would help shoppers and those wishing to catch the train from these areas. Wilton Park could also be served, reducing the likely increase in car traffic in the Town. The bus could be used by those wanting to do shopping in the main stores in the town, especially those who do not have personal vehicles.

**A previous proposal** A Hopper bus was considered by the Neighbourhood Action Group set up by Thames Valley Police,

in connection with the building of the M40 motorway service station (opened in 2009) and whether that could be used as an out of town car park with a community bus connecting it to the town. The proposed route ran via Holtspur, Gregories Road, the New Town, Maxwell Road, Wilton Park, Pyebush roundabout, the Old Town, up Aylesbury End, Wattleton Road to the schools, garden centre, A40 and back to Holtspur. The route would take about 20 minutes.

The project attracted a lot of support. The manager of Waitrose was interested in assisting its set up the County Council and Stagecoach both expressed interest, as did all shops, who saw this as a way of bringing in customers deterred by the lack of parking facilities. The Cricket Club was also open to making part of its grounds grasscreted to create an out-of-town car park.

This experience, although it came to nothing, clearly indicates there is support for a Hopper bus. We therefore recommend that a full study is made on how a community bus service can be established, possibly connected with gateway car parks. This would help to reduce parking and congestion in the town, increase access to the station and supermarkets and increase mobility of those without cars living in outlying areas who want to shop in Beaconsfield.

This would be a considerable undertaking, but there are successful models to investigate further. We know that Heart of Bucks, formerly the Bucks Community Foundation, is a grant-giving organisation which is able to offer funds on behalf of Bucks CC for community-funded local bus services.

**A useful model** The Risborough Area Community Bus service provides low floor, easily accessible transport in and around Princes Risborough and surrounding villages for all those, of all ages, inadequately served by public transport. The ‘Hail and Ride’ scheduled services run six days a week and they also run regular outings to places of interest. The bus is also available for use by individuals and not-for-profit organisations.

The service is operated by a group of regular volunteer drivers and overseen by a Board of Trustees and run by a Management Committee. Their website [www.racb.co.uk](http://www.racb.co.uk) gives further details.

Community Impact Bucks, based in Monks Risborough, has community transport expertise and can give advice on becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) or a registered charity eligible for community funding.

## RECOMMENDATION

8. That further investigations be carried out into the feasibility of developing a sustainable hopper bus service identifying partners, operators and sources of funding.

## 3 CONGESTION AND THE RELIEF ROAD

**Objective T4** To reduce congestion in and through town for the benefit of commuters and residents, and to ensure that:

- the proposed relief road meets the needs of the town to reduce congestion
- safety for other road users, especially coming to and from Wilton Park, is properly considered.

### ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED IN THE SURVEY

Congestion in and through the town elicited 57 remarks, mostly negative, although one respondent pointed out that this is the inevitable consequence of living in a thriving town. A number cited the new road scheme and markings in the New Town as an additional factor, saying they caused confusion.

There was a call from a few respondents to encourage people out of their cars, particularly those going to school. A ‘figure of eight’ bus service around the town was offered as a solution by one resident.

### CURRENT SITUATION

For much of day the traffic in the centre of the New Town is very congested. Our report ‘Reduction of congestion in Beaconsfield’ (Appendix T4) summarises the main problems.

The town acts as a confluence for traffic flowing from the east along Maxwell Road, along Penn Road and over the railway bridge, along Station Road and along Gregories Road and Burkes Road. It is worst in the morning going south from Penn Road and in the evening going north up Station Road to the New Town. A significant volume of traffic flows through to join the M40 motorway or to go east along the A40.

The Old Town is very congested between the large roundabout by the church and along London End to the Wilton Park roundabout, joining with the A355. In the mornings a high volume of traffic flows west from Wycombe End and north along Station Road. Congestion is exacerbated during term time with parents delivering their children to school, particularly the three schools in Wattleton Road, where road safety issues need to be addressed.

Similarly the A355 leading to the Wilton Park roundabout experiences high traffic volumes with tail-backs often extending to the turn to Coleshill (over 1.5km), particularly in the mornings. In the evenings the situation is reversed with congestion concentrated on the road from the Pyebush roundabout and along London End.



## A355 RELIEF ROAD

The Bucks Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership Strategic Economic Plan 2012-2031 states:

*'Plans are in place for the A355 link road being constructed to improve access between Amersham and the M40 / M4. The local interest is in a bypass which deals with the traffic from Penn/Hazlemere as well as the traffic from Amersham.*

*Funding for the link road stage 2 was allocated in 2014. Stage 1 will be constructed by Inland Homes to give access to the Wilton Park site from the Pyebush Roundabout at the correct specification for the link road, with no further development required for Stage 1.*

*The A355 Relief Road ... is included in the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Growth Deal covering the period to 2021. With the aim of improving north-south connectivity and accelerating the delivery of housing, the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP has committed to secure investment of £3.3m in public and private sector contributions into the A355 Improvement Scheme and central Government has committed to fund £6.1m.'*

We continue to be concerned, as are many other Beaconsfield people, about where the link road through Wilton Park will exit onto the A355 towards Amersham. We have heard many views expressed about the need for the road to join the A355 north of the railway opposite Ledborough Lane junction), but understand this is too expensive to be feasible. Other options are opposite Maxwell Road or Hyde Green.

**Status of plans** Buckingham County Council recently confirmed its plans to build a relief road by 2020 – within 5 years – running from the Pyebush Roundabout in the south to join the existing A355. Their May 2015 Scoping Document favours a relief road joining the A355 at the Maxwell Road junction, with improvements to the A355/Ledborough Lane junction. The plan is for the work to start in November 2017. It is estimated to take 9 months.

<http://publicaccess.buckscc.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=NQK41BDS02P00>

This would certainly relieve congestion on the Old Town roundabout, but will not of itself ease congestion in the New Town. All traffic from north of the town will continue to go through town and down Station Road or along Maxwell Road. We estimate that 46% of the traffic volume is likely to continue through the New and Old Towns even after the relief road had been built.

Maxwell Road has traffic calming in place because of St Mary's School, which would need to be reconsidered if more cars use this road as a through route. However, it would massively ease the congestion if this volume could be redirected further north along Ledborough Lane.

In the past, traffic flow along Ledborough Lane has been greater. Drivers now avoid the recently introduced speed-humps. But it can be very dangerous to turn right on to the A355 at the exit from Maxwell Road across heavy, fast-moving traffic on the A355.

Our report (Appendix T4) recommends that traffic from the Penn Road should be encouraged to go along Ledborough Lane. Thus diverted, through traffic would bypass both New and Old Town centres. Potentially flow in the New Town centre could be reduced by 40%, eliminating much of the congestion, providing a more pleasant and safer environment for all residents, businesses, road users and pedestrians.

The following actions were considered necessary to encourage this suggested flow:

- improvements at the A355/ Ledborough Lane junction
- improvements at the Ledborough Lane / Penn Road junction to facilitate free flow of traffic going north
- removal of speed bumps or restriction of traffic from using Sandelswood End and Knottocks Drive as a way of evading them
- signage in place to direct traffic along Ledborough Lane.

**Safety concerns** We recognise that the removal of speed bumps is opposed by those concerned about the safety of pedestrians, particularly of school children around High March School.

We note that there are equal safety issues around the use of Maxwell Road, and the link between Wilton Park and town. The safety of *all* road users must be fully taken into account in reaching a final solution.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

9. That the Town Council continues to champion the needs of town residents, consults with and keeps them fully informed of progress on the relief road
10. That, to reduce the impact on the town centre, derestriction of Ledborough Lane should be considered, with improvements to the junctions between Ledborough Lane and the A355, and between Ledborough Lane and the Penn Road.
11. That safety issues are properly addressed, particularly with regard to links across the A355 link road to and from Wilton Park and near the schools.



## B ENVIRONMENT WORKING GROUP SUMMARY REPORT

**Chair:** Jeannette Buckle

**Members:** Andrew Ferguson, Michael Lischter, Mary Mitchell, Giles Paddison, Liz Stevens, Patrick Hogan

**Other contributors/consultees:** Beaconsfield Town Council (BTC), South Buckinghamshire District Council (BDC), Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC), L&Q Beacon Housing

### Protecting and enhancing the natural and built character of the town

**We want to see Beaconsfield developed in a coherent and sensitive manner, to nurture what we have, meet the needs and aspirations of our diverse community and enhance the green environment that plays such an important role in defining our town’s character.**

#### INTRODUCTION

As a commuter town in a rural setting, Beaconsfield achieves a delicate balance between its natural setting of open fields and ancient woodland and the bustle of a ‘just outside London’ town. It is a balance of great value to the community and our challenge is to maintain it at a time of growth and change.

In this report we reflect on the concerns and comments raised through consultation and explore the town’s ability to furnish us with the buildings and open spaces we want and need. Recommendations are included at the end of each section.

In considering the natural environment we take stock of all the town’s open spaces, a diverse range of publicly accessible spaces scattered around the town, and other local authority and common land. Recognising that our main routes into Beaconsfield are also key to how we feel and perceive the town, we consider how they too can be enhanced for the enjoyment of all. We focus our review of the built environment on developments from around 2010 to the current day and how future development might be better controlled.

#### CREATING A ‘PRIDE IN BEACONSFIELD’

**Objective E1 To foster civic pride in maintaining and enhancing our town’**

The overriding conclusion reached by our and other Working Groups is that the proper maintenance of our town is of great benefit to residents and visitors alike, and encourages civic pride. Not doing so leads to a gradual decline in both. There is great merit in encouraging residents and businesses to contribute, so that ownership is community-wide and responsibility for our town is not vested solely in the Council.

We should be proud of such schemes as the annual Scout litter pick, backed by the Beaconsfield Society. The Society, with the agreement of BCC and BTC, also organise regular working parties that tour the town to remove illegal signage, flyposting and similar unattractive adornments of street furniture and public spaces. This is to be encouraged.

There is also merit in drawing on innovative schemes from elsewhere. One example identified by the Blue Skies Working Group is the use of ‘nudges’ to encourage people to use litter bins by stencilling footprints on the pathway leading towards the bins. This simple device led to a marked reduction in littering. A similar idea is for painted paw prints leading to dog waste bins. Laying down multi-coloured paving stones to suggest parking bays on the common land in the Old Town could encourage structured parking.

The development of a public art strategy was also considered by the Blue Skies Working Group. An increasing number of local authorities have public arts policies (and visitors to other countries can see many examples of this in practice). As well as enhancing our physical environment, public art helps to create a sense of place and distinctiveness, fostering civic pride and contributing to community belonging and cohesion. It has social and economic value, and can discourage crime. (*Appendix E*)

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That a ‘Pride in Beaconsfield’ Charter is created, encouraging everyone to take pride in their frontage to the kerb, be they commercial or residential owners
2. That spending on maintenance and gardeners is increased, to enhance our green spaces and main areas and routes into the town – possibly raising funds through sponsorship and crowdfunding
3. That residents and voluntary groups are empowered and encouraged to help with maintenance and environmental enhancement activities, including fundraising
4. That a community arts policy framework is developed to encourage art into our public spaces
5. That more research is carried out into innovative projects to encourage greater awareness of how we can all help keep our town welcoming and litter free
6. That where street furniture and public utility estates (buildings, cables and pipes and signs) are inadequately maintained this should be drawn to the attention of the relevant owner or authority
7. That ‘grasscrete’ should be considered for use where heavy vehicles routinely damage grass pavement areas.

## 1 ENHANCING OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

There is considerable potential for landscape and ecological enhancement of the town’s access routes and green spaces. In this section we explore options to:

- Turn main routes to the town into Green Fingers
- Enhance and protect our green spaces and boundaries
- Encourage exploration of our local natural environment

Further details of our research into these green initiatives are given in Appendices E2–3. Our recommendations can be seen as a Green Charter for Beaconsfield.

### ‘GREEN FINGERS’

**Objective E3 To enrich the main routes into town for the benefit of people and wildlife**

Our main approach routes, with their significant landscape features, provide a strong first impression of our town as a green and pleasant place. They are in a sense our ‘shop window’ and also important as wildlife corridors. They should be inviting and easy to use by foot, bike, wheel- or pushchair, and above all, be well maintained.

The access routes have many notable landscape features. These include a large number of mature trees, wide verges as in Penn Road and other vegetated areas such as Davenies Piece and small areas at some road junctions.

The main entry routes for Beaconsfield are:

- 40 Pyebush roundabout to the Harvester
- A355 Amersham Road from symbolic gate and town sign to London End roundabout
- B474 Penn Road (Disraeli Park) via Town Hall to Old Town Windsor End roundabout
- Candlemas Lane, Maxwell Rd, Ledborough Lane, Burkes Road; Holtspur Top Lane / Gregories Road.

For railway passengers, the line embankments, station and station approach roads including footpaths, form an important entry route.

We see great value in turning these routes into the town into ‘Green Fingers’, bringing the countryside further into the town centre. Enhancing the visual landscape of the town with a living pattern of shade and light, a flush of spring blossom, provides added interest to shoppers, tourists and the town’s folk. It not only softens the built environment, but also provides an opportunity to enhance our biodiversity and support our wildlife.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

8. That community and Council work together to:
  - plant wild flowers or bulbs along our main Green Fingers where appropriate
  - undertake a tree planting scheme across town with a commitment to plant 100 trees in 5 years, to enhance visual impact and create biodiversity
  - place more park benches along the routes for the benefit of all
9. That proper accessibility for push and wheelchairs along all main routes is ensured, on at least one side of the road, renovating paths around large trees where necessary
10. That a link from Wilton Park development to the New Town is created via a green foot/cycle path.

### ENHANCING AND PROTECTING GREEN SPACES AND BOUNDARIES (See Appendix E2)

**Objective E3 To further develop our green spaces for the benefit of townspeople, visitors and wildlife and to protect our green boundaries**

Residents’ feedback showed a clear desire to protect our green spaces and many wanted more facilities to be provided. We have an opportunity to strengthen the quality and diversity of open spaces for Beaconsfield as pleasing destinations for people to enjoy.

In particular, we believe that providing places of interest to young families is ever more important, to socialise and to learn what the outdoors and nature has to offer. Planting a community orchard in the town, for example, would give a nod to our orchard-growing history and provide a valuable educational and leisure amenity.

Our Three Wishes survey gave a voice to young families, and safe and sociable outdoor play spaces came high on many wishlists. We know from the recently launched Holtspur Park project that providing these helps bring the community together. The Old Town has Malthouse Square Recreation Ground, but the New Town has no equivalent. Such an amenity in the very centre of the New Town would add to community cohesion, provide a destination for young families and another draw to the town.

Beaconsfield’s green boundaries are very important to most residents and key to its small town charm. They help to define our town and protect it from the gradual erosion of identity, such as is happening along the A40 from Loudwater to Wycombe. They also help to maintain biodiversity and improve air quality.

However, like all small towns in the South East England, the relentless increase in population and road use puts Beaconsfield under great pressure to develop and expand.

While a large majority (90%) of survey respondents want our greenbelt land protected, some believe that housing needs



should take priority. We ourselves in this report call for new community facilities to be built. But what we lose, we will never get back, so we must be willing to resist any proposals that risk eroding our identity, in particular the green boundaries that define us and prevent urban sprawl.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

11. That the Town Council continues to support its significant natural habitat open spaces, maintaining them for the benefit of wildlife and residents
12. That the Town Council continues to support the development of our open spaces to provide added opportunities for the young to socialise, play and enjoy nature
13. That potential locations for a new playground for the New Town are identified and a project group set up to pursue feasibility and possible funding
14. That a task force is set up to investigate the feasibility of planting a community orchard in the town, ideally located near our main cluster of schools
15. That every effort is made to protect greenbelt land and other green space around the town
16. That Beaconsfield's trees are further safeguarded by reviewing individual and area TPOs and landscape succession. The special importance of ancient woodlands should be noted - Walkwood, Ledborough Wood and Browns Wood.



## 2 BUILT ENVIRONMENT

### INTRODUCTION

In this section, we look at current trends in development and how they have affected and will continue to affect the town. We identify ways in which our diverse housing needs can be met while protecting the character of the town from insensitive development, and we consider the benefits of a Neighbourhood Plan. (See Appendix E4ff)

Pressure to build new homes continues, with government proposing to construct 200,000+ starter homes in the South East, invest an extra £100bn in infrastructure and extend the right to buy to Housing Association tenants. These policies inevitably influence and shape our town, while the parallel government drive to encourage localism offers communities the chance to have more say on local planning.

What is clear is that the pressure for more and smaller homes will not go away. Beaconsfield is the largest conurbation in South Bucks District and must meet the development objectives for the area, which are currently under review. We have a window of opportunity to have an influence over what is proposed and need be proactive in supporting and guiding development for the benefit of the community.

### DEVELOPMENT IN BEACONSFIELD

**Objective E4 To support and guide future development within a clear framework, so the town's character is not lost in the drive to provide more housing**

Our survey clearly shows that many town residents already feel the town is in danger of, if not already suffering from, over-development. Whilst some concerns are linked to actual new builds, others are more concerned for the overall future of the town and the provision of supporting infrastructure for education, healthcare, traffic and the like. They underline the importance of good integrated planning for new development, with positive co-operation between Beaconsfield and its neighbours and across local government tiers, to address these broad issues.

We have considered the following areas:

- Investigation of current housing trends
- Defining and defending the Built character
- Planning frameworks and a Neighbourhood plan
- The question of affordability.

### HOUSING TRENDS

It was important for us to understand the true picture of development in order to frame our recommendations. We have therefore closely examined recent trends and development activity.

The 2009 Local Plan projection for South Bucks District was for population growth in the short term from 64000 in 2009 to

67941 (a 6% increase) in 2013 and an estimated further 4% increase by 2018 (Bucks CC Population Trends – Dec 2014), with an upward age shift in the demographic to a higher percentage of over-75s, and a decline in under 18s. A further Local Plan is in gestation, and this is very likely to review and update these population and housing projections.

Annual reports for the District for the four full years to 31 March 2014 (*SBDC Annual Monitoring Reports Part One: Main Report, Part Two: Technical Appendices*) give a measure of the net number of new dwellings in the town, their type by size, density of development and cost. Beaconsfield prices are typically 40% higher than High Wycombe – noting that this comparison is skewed by the average house size in Beaconsfield being somewhat larger.

National trends such as increased birth rate or inward migration to the District will affect local predictions, all indicate a demand for more and smaller dwellings whether as starter homes or for downsizing.

Our modern lifestyles – people living alone, in single parent units, or in affluent, aspirational families wanting more space for entertainment and leisure for example – also dictate the kinds of houses in demand here. There is a growth in home working particularly in the professional areas well represented in Beaconsfield. As young people delay working and spend more time in education, also delaying marriage, family and establishing their own homes, so many households are large and effectively multi-occupied.

Finite land in prime locations such as Beaconsfield is highly sought after and in recent years the large established older houses typical of pre-war development have been a target for development. Owners or developers can cost-effectively replace these houses, sited in substantial garden plots, with newer and considerably larger houses more suited to an aspirational modern lifestyle, with better insulation and energy use.

Alternatively, by dividing plots, large houses can still be built with gardens. And many residents have chosen to continue to enjoy the benefits of living in Beaconsfield by extending and altering their homes to respond to their lifestyle changes, or downsize and move in the town to level access more convenient to amenities. The cost of selling and moving, especially with stamp duty at the higher end, can be an incentive to stay put.

While the large and more flamboyant developments in town draw most attention, it is clear that the pressure for more and smaller homes will not go away, and our natural and built townscape will change. We therefore need clear guidelines for sensitive development to protect the special character of our residential streets and to take an active role in promoting site-appropriate architectural solutions and enhancing our green environment.

### CONCERNS OVER LOSS OF CHARACTER

Our survey confirms a key area of local concern is the potential of ‘over development’ in and around Beaconsfield. This includes new and renovated houses that are out of scale with the surrounding neighbourhood.

While some are responding to particular developments and the chaos caused during their development, nearly 11% raised a wider concern about the impact of future new development, and in particular Wilton Park, with commensurate impact on our education and healthcare provision and road space. 5% talked about a loss of character, with fewer than 1% citing poor design. Only three respondents specifically expressed a lack of confidence in SBDC planning. It is worth noting that 18% of the Town Council’s own planning objections were on character basis alone. (see Appendix E4 and E14)

### PLANNING GUIDANCE (See Appendix E7)

We set ourselves the task of reviewing the many documents that impact planning policy and decisions to see what guidance is given in terms of size and scale of new and extensively renovated residential buildings. The existing Local Plan has detailed policies and design guidance on preserving character, all of which are valuable and could benefit from further review and enhancement.

All planning documents purport to encourage development that is ‘compatible with the character of the surrounding area...’ Generally, their guidelines are more aspirational than definitive rules.

The Supplemental Planning Document (SPD) entitled ‘Residential Design Guide, October 2008’ is most useful in offering relevant and specific advice. Its stated goal is to ‘secure high quality residential development’. Section 6.2.8 states:

*“Any proposal which would appear over-dominant or obtrusive within its surroundings, by virtue of its scale and massing, will not be acceptable...”*

It is felt that if the Residential Design Guide was adhered to, the scale issue would be resolved. Unfortunately, even this type of guidance can be open to interpretation. Without very prescriptive design requirements, such as height restrictions and on the floor area to site area ratio, this will be the case. Any additional types of restrictions should be studied further to see if any could be implemented. Too much restriction, however, can be counterproductive with the result being identical cookie cutter houses responding to rigid design requirements.

One suggestion, which we recommend be implemented as soon as possible, is to require developers to provide more information about the surrounding properties in planning applications for new construction or large extensions. A site plan showing the surrounding properties is already required. If this were presented three dimensionally, showing the size and shape of the development and surrounding properties, a more

informed judgement could be made about the context of the new construction.

It is noted, however, this is not a national validation requirement and there might be some reluctance to ask for it. At the very least, as a consultee the Beaconsfield Town Council can also ask for the additional massing information. This is probably the best way to ensure this information is provided.

The Town Council website could include a page for developers and owners of new and existing buildings, providing links to key planning documents relevant to Beaconsfield (Currently 7) and detailing key information that the town would like submitted as part of the application, with special emphasis on complying with Residential Design Guide, October 2008.

Clear design guidance can be of particular help in sensitive character locations of historical and townscape value such as the Beaconsfield Old Town Conservation Area. This, together with a requirement for Design and Heritage Statements to be submitted with applications to SBDC, can be used to ensure that policy, good design and other considerations have been taken into account by the applicant.

A major concern that has arisen from recent infilling is the accumulative ‘drip’ effect on the town’s utility infrastructure of lots of small additions – especially on sewerage and where Victorian sewers are still in place. Applicants should therefore also be required to provide evidence that they have properly considered the impact of any new development on water, sewerage, power and telephony capacities.

Determining applications requires a strict adherence to policy, balancing the rights of the applicant against those of the community. This is carried out by recommendation of the planning officer. Where a council refuses an application against the advice of the officer, invariably the chance of an applicant overturning the decision on appeal rises. As well as costing the public money in its preparation, this can result in costs being awarded against the council, so decisions are not taken lightly.

## TOWARDS A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

We have noted above that the existing planning guidance has detailed and extensive policies. These must not be lost when the new South Bucks District Plan is developed by SBDC.

However, we believe we need to go further in protecting our town from inappropriate development and that the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Beaconsfield should be considered. Neighbourhood Plans, introduced under the 2011 Localism Act to sit alongside the District Plan promise greater autonomy at a local level and may aid future decision making and approval success rates. For relevant new development the introduction of a community infrastructure levy (CIL) by the District Council would provide valuable funding for essential infrastructure to support the expected growth of the town.

Neighbourhood Plans can influence planning decisions. The benefits and costs involved must be investigated in more detail but it is clear it has more weight in planning terms when applications are put forward. If our neighbouring towns and villages do so, this only strengthens the need for us to do likewise to ensure robust plans are in place to protect us.

A Neighbourhood Plan is a matter for consideration by Beaconsfield Town Council. We recognise that to produce one is a big and lengthy undertaking and will need additional community support. The work done by our Group has gone some way to preparing the ground work and provides some base data analysis to help inform the process. We would like to continue this support.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

17. That all developers should be required to provide more information about the surrounding properties in planning applications for new construction and or large extensions, to ensure they are of an appropriate scale and form. This should be shown in elevations and in a *three dimensional* drawing of the site and the surrounding properties.
18. That when redevelopment occurs, the site should support enough vegetation to be in keeping with the area, particularly in maintaining a green streetscape
19. That the Town Council website should include a page for developers of new and existing buildings, giving guidance notes, links to key planning documents and any supplementary information sought.
20. That the Town Council should review all known infrastructure issues and draw up an Action Plan for the responsible authorities to tackle them, and ensure new developments do not negatively impact on surrounding neighbours, or provide mitigation.
21. That the Town Council, in conjunction with other authorities as necessary, should ensure that new developments have adequate physical infrastructure and support for health, education and recreational needs.
22. That the Town Council move to review the development of its own Neighbourhood Plan to strengthen its position within the planning framework, seeking support from the community.

**THE QUESTION OF AFFORDABILITY**

**Objective E5 To ensure that the town continues to provide a diversity of housing, in order to maintain the diversity of our community**

The residents’ survey highlighted a concern that Beaconsfield is no longer affordable to people on an average or modest income, and many commented that their grown children could not afford to live near them – neither can many key workers.

There is considerable confusion about the term ‘affordability’, which in planning legislation is defined as meeting the needs of people who cannot afford to buy or rent at market rates - with rents typically set at around 50% of the market value. (In the past three years the government has introduced a new scheme whereby rented homes are being added to the market with rents set at 71% of market value.)

40 percent of Wilton Park housing is currently earmarked as ‘affordable’ and we understand that the living quarters on site are to be refurbished. However, experience from other parts of the country shows that this percentage can be negotiated down, and that developers can instead fund social housing elsewhere in the District. We therefore suggest that pressure needs to be maintained to ensure that the full allocation of more modest housing remains in Wilton Park, or at least in Beaconsfield.

**MARKET RATE AFFORDABILITY**

The official definition of ‘affordability’ is not the same as being more ‘affordable’ in the sense that many of our survey respondents have used the term. There is certainly a need for both to ensure that diversity of population is maintained and to enable incoming or young people to buy at the lower end of the local market.

See Appendix E5 for a fuller exposition.

It is clear that housing in Beaconsfield is considered to be more expensive than in similar areas of South East England, and concerns have been raised about the impact this has on the town and its residents. A crude comparison of average house price always looks unfavourable for Beaconsfield (typically 40% higher than High Wycombe), the average skewed by the average house size here being somewhat larger.

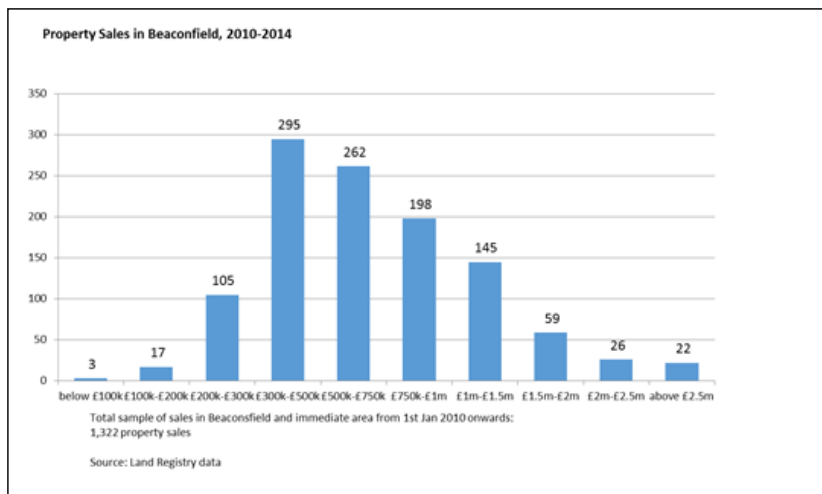
To test this perception, we analysed property sales values over the past five years (see Appendix E6 and chart below).

Beaconsfield property is obviously not homogenous, and the map and charts given in the Appendix show how the sales value profile can be viewed geographically across the town. (It must be noted that our analysis is limited as it does not allow for relative sizes of property. Plot and property size are certainly key factors in explaining the difference in average property prices between (say) Burkes Road and Ronald Road, and this is not adjusted for.)

What is of positive note is there is a very wide mix of property prices all within a prime location, be it the New or Old Town or the Holtspur area, providing reasonable diversity. More affordable properties are likely to be to the west of the town in Holtspur and to the east in Maxwell Road and east of Station Road. There are significant differences in property values between these and other areas of town, with some concentrations of very expensive housing, even by South East England measures.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- 23. That the Town Council should be proactive in ensuring that the town benefits fully from the requirement for developers to provide 40% affordable housing.



Property sales 2010-2014 (peak between £300-750k) App 6



## C LOCAL ECONOMY AND TOURISM WORKING GROUP SUMMARY REPORT

**Chair:** Gareth Ashington (Owner, Ashington Page)

**Members:** David Teasdale (investor), Les Davies (retired), Brian Newman Smith (Bekonscot), Sharon Hewitt (Chiltern Relocation), Barry Moxley (Traveltime), Trudy Scrivener (Universal Care)

**Other contributors:** Jacqui Hogan (Cocreative), Belinda Avery (High March); Caroline Piercy (Waitrose), John Riding (Hall Barn Estates); Pete Foster (V4B Communications lead)

### Connecting business and community in support of the town

We want to sustain and grow a thriving diverse local economy that meets the needs and aspirations of residents, businesses and employees, encourages new retail and attracts visitors to spend money in the town.

#### INTRODUCTION

This working group began its work with a review of responses to the Vision for Beaconsfield general residents' survey and to a later online business survey.

Responses to the latter were very disappointing, despite canvassing of local businesses by working group members. We therefore capitalised on our existing networks to seek the expertise of local retailers/businesses and have benefited from useful in-depth conversations with representatives from Hall Barn Estates, Waitrose, High March School and Bekonscot Model Village and Chiltern Railways.

#### SURVEY FINDINGS

The character of Beaconsfield, and its attractiveness to residents and visitors alike, depends greatly on the health of its high street. The residents' survey highlighted a wish to maintain and increase the number of smaller, independent retailers, which in turn protects the individuality of the town.

Many respondents identified issues of inadequate parking and high business rates as threats, points that our later conversations also brought out. These problems can mean the loss of employment opportunities – one commentator noted that he had moved his business to Bourne End because of high running costs, and since then his business had grown to employ 90 people.

Data suggests that around 35% of the working population in Beaconsfield is self-employed, and the town was recently identified as an entrepreneurial hub in the South East. There is therefore a vibrant business community with no shopfront, much of which goes under the radar.

We are conscious there is a great deal more to be done to engage the local business community in shaping the town's future, and encourage all actions to do so. Experience from other towns has shown that the business community can be a powerful force for change.

The sample size from the business survey was too small to provide us with an accurate picture of local opinion, but some key themes did emerge.

- Improving car parking provision
- Offering fast broadband - ideally with blanket wifi across the town
- Promoting local loyalty
- Capitalising on the town's location
- Developing a comprehensive list of local activity to aid businesses

#### RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The increasing strains on the town economy have been the main focus of our enquiries. Our goal, as stated above, is to sustain a diverse local economy to meet the needs of residents, encourage new businesses and attract visitors to spend money in town.

We have looked at what challenges the local economy faces, what sort of economy we want to sustain and encourage, and what we need to do to support this. Some problems need urgent solutions if our retail sector is to remain healthy. We have also identified some areas of potential growth.

In addressing the key issues to emerge from the survey and from our initial discussions we have explored:

- 1 Parking
- 2 'Think local, shop local' – a range of support for local businesses
- 3 The market in the Old Town
- 4 The visitor economy (tourism)



## 1 PARKING

**Objective LE1 To provide a sustainable mix of parking solutions across town to support a healthy local economy, balancing the need for all-day and short-term parking.**

The town’s parking problems has been the subject of a full review, well covered in the preceding Transport and Parking Working Group Summary Report. Findings from the Local Economy Group were fed to that group for development, and recommendations are included in their report Here, we summarise the key business concerns.

All retail is now vulnerable to the shift in shopping to online, but Beaconsfield remains fortunate in having a lively retail offer. However, there are real signs of strain. The key contributing factor is identified as the lack of parking in both the New and Old Towns, with the high cost of parking in the District Council-owned car parks deterring casual shoppers in the New Town (two hours’ parking costs 50p in Bourne End, £1.80 in Beaconsfield. (See Appendix LE1 for full comparative parking charges and schemes.) Parking provided in the New Town supermarkets helps to some extent – but there is no such facility in the Old Town.

The deterrent effect of high charges is acknowledged in a key finding of the *Rethink!* report on high street parking, which showed that, for 2011:

*‘The mid-range and smaller groupings of centres that charge more than the national average in accordance with their offer, suffered a higher than average decline in footfall...’*

Many towns seek to ameliorate the problem, for example by offering the first half-hour free or local discounts for council tax payers. We are aware this is already under consideration by the Town Council, and warmly support action in this matter.

If the town’s parking issues are not resolved in the short to medium term, local businesses will struggle to survive, especially the independent retailers that most town people want to protect.

### BALANCING NEED

It is well understood that a tension exists between the need for all-day parking for employees and a need for short term, low cost or free parking for customers and clients. Train commuters add to this problem by parking for free to avoid high charges at the station, congesting residential roads that have no parking restrictions.

In the Old Town, the parking problem is particularly acute and retailers report a significant reduction of footfall, which threatens their viability. (Businesses such as the Old Town Fryer rely heavily on passing trade.) The inability to regulate parking on common land has a huge impact. With the free parking quickly filled by all-day parkers, customers struggle to find

places, so go elsewhere. The Old Town is also a pick-up point for coach parties, meaning a further influx of people (often local apparently) parking for the day. Once free parking is filled by all-day parkers, day visitors and customers struggle to find places.

There is no doubt that the Old Town urgently needs a long-term parking solution that encourages all day parkers to park in places that do not impact adversely on retailers. The sheer number of parked cars, sometime sparked chaotically, also detracts from the visual appeal of this historic area to visitors.

We do not intend to demonise those who park all day. Any parking solution must address the real needs of employees in both Old and New Town. With poor local transport, many depend on a car to travel to work and would struggle to afford

### Case study: Waitrose

Waitrose supermarket is one of the town’s largest employers, with approximately 270 partners (employees), the majority of whom work part time. Their car park provides 270 spaces for customers, who are given 2 hours free parking, which many used to go shopping in town (Sainsbury’s provides 3 hours). However, there are only 20 spaces for staff, allocated on a first come first served basis. Most employees must therefore park in the town’s roads, where the parking restrictions end, adding to the problem of congestion. The lack of parking within reasonable walking distance makes staff recruitment, particularly for part-time staff, harder.

the parking rates in town.

**OUR RECOMMENDATIONS on parking have been passed to the Parking Working Group and area included in their report.**

## 2 ‘THINK LOCAL, BUY LOCAL’

**Objective LE2 To support and grow the independent retail sector through the creation of a loyalty scheme and business directory, and connect commerce and community via a virtual town hub**

The worrying decline of high streets across the country has been the focus of both central government and local initiatives – the move to online shopping is just one of many factors. Beaconsfield is in a better position than most. We have counted approximately 40 independent retailers/businesses in the New Town high street, excluding estate agents, and several national chain outlets have arrived in recent years.

Many bemoan the number of charity shops, but they also have ardent supporters and do a great deal of business. Sometimes filling otherwise empty units, they offer minimal employment opportunities but do offer work experience.

As detailed above, the situation is much more challenging in the Old Town. Encouraging the town to have an action plan for the shops here features highly in suggestions from Old Town residents, who fear that without a plan of action they could soon die out. In a recent article (*The Times* 19.06.2015: Bricks and Mortar p10) Bidwells for Hall Barn Estates explained a little of their own plans to bring in new retail and restaurant outlets, to add variety and stimulate more footfall, specifically targeted at a high end market.

Our local independents are valued. They give our high streets flavour. If we want to keep them, we need to do more to develop a town-wide 'Think local, spend local' strategy, as was particularly highlighted by our business survey.

Many towns now have 'Town Teams' comprising all those with an interest in the High Street (businesses, police, Town Council etc.) to create and deliver positive changes. This idea came out of the Portas Review and has since been supported by numerous national high street commentators.

There is a great deal of guidance on the web, especially from '100 Ways to Help the High Street' ([www.100ways.org.uk](http://www.100ways.org.uk)) which covers such areas as enhancing the streetscape, creating a 'place' identity, attracting new businesses and keeping old ones, and making the high street accessible to all. Our group was unable to pursue this guidance further, but considered several initiatives that we felt might offer useful returns:

**On the street publicity** To increase the visibility of businesses in town to potential customers, visitors or residents, we propose a town map sited at strategic points with retail and other businesses marked. Rather than a fixed sign, this could be a digital terminal, which would provide a flexible platform for businesses to promote themselves and draw attention to special offers and events, etc. It could be allied to the proposed central communication hub linking business to business and businesses with customers.

**Loyalty schemes** A number of companies provide this service for communities and there are many models for delivery from the hi-tech to the lo-tech, such as discount cards and apps to local currencies (eg the Bristol Pound). One successful local example, Savvy Loyalty, is discussed in Appendix E2. Local loyalty schemes have been implemented by Wycombe District Council and Windsor and Maidenhead Councils, whereby council tax payers receive reductions on car parking and other facilities. We understand that some retailers in the Old Town are already looking into creating their own loyalty scheme and would wish to pursue this with a view to developing the project in a holistic way. A collective effort will be far more effective, ideally linked into a virtual hub.

**Business Directory** Beaconsfield is currently without its own Chamber of Commerce and it was very difficult to obtain even partial up-to-date information about our local economy. The disappointingly low number of respondents to the business survey, and the difficulty of contacting them, helped to highlight the need for a comprehensive local Directory.

Appendix LE3 provides a full survey of private and council-led networks available locally. Bucks Business First already provides a very useful, free platform and meets regularly in town. There are also several private networking groups to meet the needs of different sectors. Existing groups are well attended and all have spare capacity. However, despite the high level of enterprise in town, our impression is that general awareness and take-up of these networks is low. This makes encouraging 'think local, shop local' buy-in more difficult.

Setting up and running a stand-alone Directory from scratch is unviable. Increasing awareness of, and encouraging local businesses to join existing networks – especially Bucks Business First – is the most effective way forward. However we believe that our business community would benefit greatly from access to consumers and other local businesses via a town-specific digital communication hub. This hub could, for example, be a good way to advertise special loyalty scheme deals and highlight new start-ups. The Community and Leisure Report looks in detail at the wider Virtual Hub proposal.

## CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Several local businesses work actively with the community (eg Waitrose's community fund, Winkworth's and Frost's sponsored advertising of events) and many others give generously to schools and volunteer organisations. This benefits both company and community. Our business survey elicited comments about the difficulty of finding information about the voluntary sector in town, in order to build these valuable links and make it easier for organisations to find sponsors. We see this as a further benefit of a central communication hub.

The Environment Working Group report discusses ways in which businesses could contribute to creating a 'Pride in Beaconsfield' by taking responsibility for their frontage. Another simple way in which businesses can support the community is to encourage open access to their wifi networks, attracting customers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That businesses, Council and V4B members should work together to develop a sustainable 'Think local, buy Local' strategy and encourage local buy-in
2. That additional research should be carried out on ways to help our high street and a plan of action proposed, including a specific plan for Old Town shops
3. That while Bucks Business First and other networks should be promoted, the needs of businesses should also be addressed in the plans for a virtual communications hub, eg building a local directory to link retail and customers, and to help businesses to network
4. That the feasibility of installing (interactive) town maps to direct people to local retail and other businesses and attractions, should be investigated. This should be allied to the investigation into the wider virtual hub.

### 3 THE VISITOR ECONOMY

**Objective LE3: to ensure the survival and restoration to good health of the town’s key attraction, and to explore other ways of increasing the town’s visitor offer**

Beaconsfield’s attractive Old Town remains popular as a destination, while others are attracted by the town’s literary and political heritage. However, there is no doubt that the town’s main attraction is Bekonscot Model Village and Railway.

Bekonscot sets Beaconsfield apart from most other commuter towns. To many it is what the town is famous for and many generations of families have visited it. It puts us on the map and is a real source of civic pride.

In recent years, this business has started to come under serious threat. The number of visitors from January – April saw a drop of 6.3% between 2014 (33,659) to 2015 (31,535). Comparing the figures January–March saw an even bigger drop of 13%.

Although weather played a role, Bekonscot visitor surveys reveal that parking is a major cause of the decline. They tell us that visitors travel up to 2 hours by road and the lack of nearby parking means many give up and turn away. If this trend continues in 10 years Bekonscot may no longer be viable. A rental agreement with St Teresa’s car park is problematic, as spaces are reduced when the Church has a wedding, funeral or a special event. The building of the Church Hall has meant an increase in events and subsequent restriction in availability to Bekonscot.

Bekonscot has been exploring alternative parking options with St Michael’s Church, and have been in discussions with the Town Council for some time. It is however worth emphasising in this report that the need is now urgent and every effort must be made to secure the attractions’ future, for the benefit of our whole town. While expanding existing car parks is the obvious option, we believe additional innovative solutions should be sought to increase capacity in the short term. Valet parking and ‘driveway surfing’ were ideas discussed by our group.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- 5. That a speedy solution to Bekonscot’s parking problems be found – recognising that the Town Council is already consulting on the provision of additional parking in the New Town, but that innovative short-term parking solutions are also needed.

If Bekonscot’s parking problems are not resolved we risk losing this iconic town attraction within the next 5–10 years



**ATTRACTING VISITORS**

Our residents’ survey indicated no great enthusiasm for increasing tourism in our town, with many considering that any boost would just bring more unwanted congestion. However, there is a clear desire from local traders to increase footfall, and attracting visitors is an important part of the mix. Our town has a rich social and cultural history worth celebrating and many come to explore the town and its green surrounds. It is also true that what is attractive to visitors is also so to residents.

Proposals originating in the Environment and Blue Skies Working Groups address this opportunity.

**Walking and cycling maps:** We believe that volunteers could be found to produce interesting walking and cycling maps for visitors and residents. These could be downloaded from a community website or obtained from a central information hub, at the Library and Town Hall. Both Old and New Town centres are well situated as axis points, with ample eateries or picnic areas from which to start a walk. (We recognise that car parking could be an issue and that this should be factored into any proposal.)

A town map could, for example, link places of historic and literary importance, while a variety of walks and rides would allow people to explore the surrounding countryside. We are blessed with a rich diversity of green spaces, including jewels such as Walkwood, Holtspur Bank Nature Reserve and Holtspur Butterfly Reserve.

Our beautiful countryside is easy to reach by foot or bike. But many do not know or make use of these amenities. We need to raise our town’s green profile and encourage both residents and visitors to use them for their health and wellbeing.

Last year Simply Walk started up in Beaconsfield, offering short walks around and out of town. This initiative could be expanded, or a new project begun, to provide a variety of pleasant and varied walks through the town and countryside, with stunning views (lasting typically 1-2 hours).

**A BEACONSFIELD FESTIVAL**

Our surveys revealed an interest in adding additional events to the Beaconsfield calendar. The town is fortunate in having a wide range of voluntary organisations who put on talks, art shows, concerts and other performances. It is also considered a destination town for restaurants and pubs, and has an excellent Farmer’s Market. So food and the arts are two potential reasons to celebrate.

The idea of an additional festival event in the town was examined by the Blue Skies Working Group.

By coordinating activities and leveraging publicity and other resources, it should be possible to create a situation where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We have seen locally at Woburn Green how this principle has worked well in creating



an Arts festival for all ages. The Chalfont St Giles and Jordans Literary Festival has been going successfully for three years, and there are several well established music festivals in neighbouring towns and villages.

All help bring money into the local economy. Importantly, all encourage community involvement and cohesion.

We believe there is potential to include a community arts project in this festival, or separately. As an example, a member of the Blue Skies Working Group has worked on a Nebraska, US project which engaged the community in the definition, construction and ongoing maintenance of an arts installation in the local library, targeted at their young readers. This generated positive community benefits at many levels, akin to the benefits of other public art (see Appendix B).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6. That an initiative is supported to develop town map and walking routes leaflets/maps linking places of historic and literary importance in our town and to encourage exploration of our green surroundings.
- 7. That the voluntary sector is encouraged to develop ideas for an additional town cultural festival along the lines of others in the locality, bringing benefit to the local economy.



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**THE OLD TOWN MARKET**

**Objective LE4 To revive the Old Town Market as an important amenity for residents and a valuable launchpad for new businesses**

A market has been held in Beaconsfield for hundreds of years. It remains part of the Old Town’s charm, and is important to the community, especially to older residents and those who have no car, who come every week to buy household staples and fresh produce.

The market also now provides a valuable outlet for small start-up businesses, which can trial their business before committing to permanent premises. In this way, the market plays an important role in the health of our local economy.

The financial turnover of the market has been steadily decreasing in recent years. The reduction is around 10% between 2014 and 2015. Being able to park and shop at the market is very difficult and as a result many customers and potential customers go elsewhere. More parking is required and more could be created by encouraging parking turnover on market days.

Allied with moves to solve the Old Town parking problems, the group sees great potential in encouraging a revival of the market. We understand that work is already underway on this, and support the development of a coherent strategy within the Town Plan.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 8. That a coherent strategy is developed to revive and sustain the market, involving all stakeholders (Hall Barn Estates, SBDC, the Town Council and V4B), to include:
  - the creation of a professionally created marketing campaign
  - a relaunch with special events and editorial,
  - online support and publicity via communications hub
  - increasing signage to attract customers
  - encouragement for more start-up businesses to start at the market through special rates/promotions
  - a wider solution to the Old Town parking problem as an important element.



## D COMMUNITY AND LEISURE WORKING GROUP SUMMARY REPORT

**Chair:** Jeremy Brooks

**Members:** Sue Davis, Sue Dorman, Rachel Ferguson, Nanu Hodson, Debbie Marsden, Deborah Sanders, Susan Sheahan, Laurence Smaje

**Other contributors/consultees:** Stuart Cartledge, Auderiah Payne, Kate Ellis-Picton, Jane Woolf

### Bringing the community together

**We want to bring our community together by building a town where people can meet and connect with one another through excellent sport, culture and other leisure activities.**

**We want a town where communication is made easy through online and physical places.**

#### INTRODUCTION

In the 2009 Town Plan, the second aim of the strategic plan was ‘to foster community spirit and activity’, an aim which also guides our work.

A number of goals were set, such as improvements to parks and recreation grounds, the continued provision of information to visitors and residents, the support of young people in the town and provision of youth facilities; the encouragement of the flourishing of community events such as the Festival of Lights, Awareness Day (now Beaconsfield Now!), the Country Fayre and the continuance of the police presence in town. Much has been achieved, but a further aim to develop a facility for public use on the Town Hall site seems not to have gone very far.

Sharing the same aim, we have used the results of the town survey as a basis for our work, drawing also on our combined experience of volunteering in this community. We have looked at the range of facilities available, asked what is missing or could be improved and how well the different sectors are provided for. We have also looked at what more can be done to bring a rather fragmented community together.

#### SURVEY AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

In response to the survey questions about the state of our community spirit and of the cultural and leisure facilities in Beaconsfield, a number of themes came through clearly.

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents agreed that Beaconsfield had a good community spirit, with a similar number saying they knew how to find out about community events etc. However, the numbers of those who disagreed – as opposed to having no view or not knowing – is significant. One in five disagreed that Beaconsfield had a good community spirit and the sense of a real decline comes through in many comments. The following is not untypical:

*‘Having lived in Beaconsfield my whole life, for 34 years, I feel that Beaconsfield has lost its community spirit totally. I feel pushed out and very sad that I can no longer afford to live in the town in which I grew up.’*

- More than one in four respondents did not believe we had a good means of communicating information about community events, strongly suggesting the need for a central communication hub.

These are significant enough minorities for us to consider how things can be improved, and it has to be said that their comments echo the experience of many voluntary organisations on the ground, who struggle to get more residents actively involved.

- When it came to the provision of cultural and leisure facilities, half of the respondents disagreed with the proposition that there was a good range of cultural and leisure facilities and only just over a third agreed with it.
- 45% said that Beaconsfield provided for the needs of older people, but only 14% felt that there was enough for young people to do. The children’s ‘Three Wishes’ survey emphasised the desire for more for families to do together, with very strong votes for a swimming pool, cinema, indoor sports and outdoor playground.

#### A NOTE ON HEALTHCARE AND EDUCATION PROVISION

Unsurprisingly, our survey showed very high satisfaction rate with our current services, at 80%. However, over three-quarters expressed concern at the impact of increasing development on our local infrastructure. The provision of healthcare and education relies on planning at a much higher level and we made the decision not to research these areas actively.

We are advised that educational planning at County level is well in hand to address future needs, especially in regard to the development at Wilton Park. We also understand that the town’s two health centres are planning how they will meet the needs of a growing, and ageing, population and would wish to conduct further research. Beaconsfield would benefit enormously from a Minor Injuries Unit and similar services can be offered by GP surgeries.

## OVERALL OBJECTIVES

Based on the findings of our survey, and our knowledge of the town, the Working Group identified the following objectives for the new Town Plan, which merited further research:

- The provision of a multi-sports facility in Beaconsfield
- The provision of an arts centre and cinema for the town
- The creation of a central community hub
- The creation of an online community hub

We also looked at the provision for youth and the elderly.

## EXISTING FACILITIES

Our research confirmed the wide range of community facilities in Beaconsfield, although it required considerable research to gather reliable information about them. (The list is given in Appendix C1.) This diversity is to be celebrated, as it enables our community to maintain its own diversity, with different facilities for different age groups and interests.

However, there is a sense of ‘fragmentation’, with little cohesion between the various amenities. Most are relatively small and modestly equipped, creating real problems for activities such as dramatic performances, film shows or concerts, which require larger venues. Sports venues struggle to meet demand and provide modern facilities. (Appendix C2 provides information.)

There are good arguments for rationalising the facilities we have in order to provide a more coherent range, and for expanding provision where it is lacking or inadequate. There is also a very strong argument for providing a central hub for the town which provides for the whole community. While a physical space – such as could be provided on the Town Hall site – is important, a parallel online presence is also vital if we are to bring a modern community closer together.

## 1 SPORTS PROVISION IN BEACONSFIELD

**Objective C1 To increase outdoor and indoor sports provision for all ages, and to maximise the benefit of what already exists in town**

Sports are vital to our community’s health and wellbeing. When people were asked to elaborate on what they wanted to see in Beaconsfield, the most common response was better sports facilities generally and for a swimming pool in particular. A pool came top of the list in our Three Wishes survey. This elaborates further the 50% of respondents who felt that leisure and cultural facilities were inadequate.

At present the town has a reasonable range of public and private sporting facilities, but many are in need of refurbishment or cannot meet demand. The Beacon Centre in Holtspur is a multi-use function indoor sports hall and gym and a further hall shared as a theatre and sports space, with limited parking facilities. The fact that this Centre is required both for sports and for cultural activities leads to frustration from both sets of users. A building such as this one should really have a single

main purpose, with alternative accommodation found for the other uses.

## ASPIRATION

It is our aspiration to bring many of the town’s sporting activities together in a state-of-the-art sports and leisure facility on one site. Our initial research indicates that, while ambitious this is not unfeasible. Appendix C3 looks at two case studies and Appendix C4 reviews the concept of what might be incorporated into such a facility in Beaconsfield.

Excellent as it is, we do not believe the new leisure facility at Handy Cross properly meets the needs of young families and the older generation. A facility within easy distance of home is more appropriate for these groups.

## OPTIONS

Beaconsfield is an affluent market town also serving nearby villages. Research suggests that the town and its environs is large enough and has the right kind of population to sustain a leisure centre with a swimming pool.

The expansion and redevelopment of the Beacon Centre is worth investigating as an option but with development in Beaconsfield set to increase in the coming years, it is believed that land could be available for a new-build project.

Undoubtedly the most problematic aspect of delivering any new build would be the swimming pool. But this is the one thing that adults and children alike believe would be the best addition to our town is a pool. Respecting this wish, we should explore as many possibilities as possible, in some depth.

**Capitalising on what we have** It is worth noting firstly that there are three swimming pools in town located in schools – at Davenies, High March and Alfriston (just beyond the town boundaries, but within the built up area of ‘greater Beaconsfield’). Alfriston School already provides time for general community swimming outside of school hours and High March opens its facility to a private swimming tutor for swimming coaching for children.

If there is no political will to include a swimming pool in a new sports centre, we would encourage these three schools to consult about setting up a consortium whereby public swimming would be available through the week in each of these three venues at different times.

**Private/community partnership model** We recognise that in the current and expected economic climate it is highly unlikely that local authorities would be willing or able to fund or operate a multi-sports facility, particularly now Handy Cross has been developed. However our initial analysis suggests there is considerable merit in a combined private/community partnership approach. The private involvement brings in the necessary capital investment, the community element clearly demonstrates the intention to deliver long term benefits to the town, engages with residents and potential patrons.

The business model would be to set up a property company to own the land and fund the development. This PropCo would then offer a long lease to a Community Interest Company to operate the facility. The PropCo could itself be part funded by local benefactors, philanthropists or crowd funding. The CIC would operate a membership scheme, rent courts and halls to clubs and individuals, run a bar and café to sustain the operation and reinvest any surplus into further facilities and services for the benefit of the community.

The CIC, as a charitable venture, has the potential to apply for and obtain ongoing support from various Health, Sports and Disability sources. Sources of funding for construction would need to be found but, based on examples of existing facilities of this type, it should not be an impossible task.

Importantly, the CIC would have the declared aim from the outset to be a Community asset, to be inclusive, to improve the health and well being of local people rather than just make a profit. This model is most likely to succeed. We do not need another privately owned sports club.

**STRENGTHENING OTHER SPORTS FACILITIES**

**Sport at Wilton Park** The developers of Wilton Park are already committed to the provision of football pitches as part of the overall development and it may be that other sports facilities such as a bowling green, cycling facilities and general keep fit facilities could be provided there. We understand that outside funding for a Velo Park may be available for cycling facilities, and we believe that such options should be explored as part of the planning provision on that site.

**A Skate Park** In 2013, a lot of work was done across the community, including by a significant group of young people, to create a skate park in Beaconsfield. There was much enthusiasm for this project and the fact that it came to nothing caused much sadness and indeed resentment amongst youngsters. We believe that any consideration of improved sports and leisure facilities should include the notion of a skate park being created at a suitable venue.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. That we encourage the creation of a consortium of schools with swimming pools to promote greater community use
2. That a dedicated taskforce is set up to investigate the feasibility of a multi-use sports facility, including swimming facilities, to be managed by a community non-profit organisation
3. That the Town Council actively promotes the inclusion of other sporting facilities in addition to football in the development of Wilton Park
4. That the Town Council re-open the exploration of the siting of a skate park within Beaconsfield.

**2 ARTS CENTRE AND CINEMA**

**Objective C2 To enrich the cultural life of the town through the provision of better facilities for the arts, performance and film**

The desire for better cultural and leisure facilities comes through strongly in the survey, with over 50% of respondents saying that they did not think Beaconsfield was well served in this field. Of individual comments made, 14 people said that they thought Beaconsfield needed a cinema and it featured high on our children’s wishlists. A further 10 asked for an arts centre. This is supported by evidence collected over some time, and the frustrations felt by audiences and performers in using multi-use buildings has been highlighted above. Many feel that a town of Beaconsfield’s wealth and standing should support a richer cultural life.

**Cinema** Many Beaconsfield residents remember the original cinema in Beaconsfield, sited near the junction of Station Road and Maxwell Road in what is now Prezzo’s Restaurant, and regret its passing.

The National Television and Film School in Station Road (NTFS) has a 150-seater cinema/screening room. This is primarily for student use, but the NTFS does work in partnership with the community to provide access in the following ways:

- The Beaconsfield Film Society, a community group, uses the cinema twice a month – generally on the second Friday and fourth Saturday evenings of the month – for a film showing for its members. It has a current membership of 450 people, but aims ‘never to have too many members’. Programmes tend to concentrate more on ‘art house’ films.
- Children’s showings: In 2015, children’s films have been shown on a Saturday morning for young families.
- Charity evenings: The NTFS also makes the cinema available on a Thursday evening on occasion for charity groups wishing to hold a fundraiser event. This is well used by the community.

Although the NTFS is assiduous in allowing the community to use the facilities, clearly it is a limited facility and we consider an alternative should be investigated, as part of a larger arts centre study.

**ARTS AND PERFORMANCE CENTRE**

Beaconsfield has no dedicated space for events such as art exhibitions, theatre and operatic performances, and Local groups use a number of different buildings:

- The Bucks Arts Society has an annual weekend exhibition in the Fitzwilliams Centre
- Chiltern Shakespeare Company has an annual performance of a Shakespeare play which takes place in the grounds of Hall Barn. It rehearses at High March.
- Beaconsfield Operatic Society rehearses and performs at the Curzon Centre, Maxwell Road (capacity 250). It performs two shows every year. Severe lack of parking at or near the Centre acts as a barrier to audiences.



- Young Theatre also rehearses and performs at the Curzon Centre. It rehearses weekly and performs two or three productions every year, including a pantomime over the Christmas season. New legislation requiring separate changing areas for boys and girls will make it difficult for Young Theatre to continue in this space. They will need to find a new home.
- The Beaconsfield Theatre Group performs two plays a year at The Beacon Centre, Holtspur Way. The Centre is useful in having raked seating but this is old and needs upgrading, as does the lighting and sound equipment. Moreover, there is insufficient provision for changing rooms and toilet facilities backstage and no provision for set building, storage or rehearsals (the cast rehearse at the Holtspur URC, Crabtree Close). The ‘bar’ is downstairs with no disabled access and is a very unpleasant space. Parking can be pushed to its limits for larger audiences and the balance between sports usage and cultural use is difficult to maintain as sports take priority.
- Local chamber orchestra, The Faust Ensemble, uses St Mary & All Saints’ Church for concerts two or three times a year and other local groups such as Village Voices or the Chiltern Bach Choir also perform regularly.
- There are regular series of weekly lunchtime concerts at the United Reformed Church, Aylesbury End which have a devoted following.
- Beaconsfield Concerts used to arrange concerts at the High School, attracting artists of international standing, but the society had to close when it was unable to elect a new committee to take on the running of the programme.

### A CLEAR NEED FOR A NEW FACILITY

It is clear that the two main venues for dramatic performances – the Curzon Centre and the Beacon Centre – both have fundamental problems in hosting cultural events. In the light of all these factors, and the prospect of continuing population growth, we believe a priority for the town should be to create a better venue for the Arts. A sufficiently large auditorium would enable films to be screened as well as performances to take place, and the foyer could host arts and crafts exhibitions.

### POSSIBLE MODELS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The group considered other towns of a similar demographic make-up and looked at the Norden Farm Centre for the Arts in Maidenhead offers as an interesting comparison. It received Lottery funding to build and house a 280-seat capacity theatre and a 100-seat studio. Norden Farm presents a varied programme of film, theatre, music, visual arts, comedy and classes. It is also a venue for conferences, seminars, meetings and social functions. However, it felt that such a large stand-alone facility would be difficult to fund and sustain in a town of our size.

Amersham provides an interesting alternative worth considering. A community group, the Kings Church Amersham, shares its facilities with arts groups in a way which benefits both communities. We believe that the option of a partnership with another community group locally, one which could provide adequate parking, should also be seriously considered. It would

need to be able to offer a substantial performance space as well as decent backstage facilities.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

5. That greater community use of the cinema at the NFTS is encouraged.
6. That a working group is set up to explore options for the establishment of a new Arts Centre for Beaconsfield. Conversations should include discussing the possibility of a partnership with a local community group.

## 3 A COMMUNITY HUB IN BEACONSFIELD

### Objective C3 To create a vibrant central locus for the town community to meet

As can be seen from [Appendix C1](#), there are a large number of community facilities in the town. Some are owned by the local authority (Town, District or County) and many by churches or charities and let out for community use.

In the Supplementary Planning Document for Wilton Park (SPD) it is envisaged that new community facilities will be provided on that site. The document states:

*‘The SPD makes no assumptions and sets no requirements about the use to which the facilities will be put or the local clubs which will use them. The aim is to provide a new community building (or buildings) that will add to the quantum of community facilities already available in Beaconsfield and should not result in any reduction in the existing level of facilities to serve the town. The community hub could include a multi-use community facility or it could be a sports-oriented facility or arts-oriented facility.’*

The public consultation that led to the SPD, elicited a large number of diverse requests for facilities for sports and the arts to be based there. From discussions with the planners and the owners of the site, it is clear that the use of the site has not been determined. It is therefore essential that the community is fully engaged in the discussions that lead to a decision about what is to be built. We must take this opportunity to add real value, not just more of the same. Both the arts and sports offer genuine potential to do so.

### A CENTRAL HUB

While we welcome the development of a new community facility at Wilton Park, it is our strong recommendation that a thriving town such as Beaconsfield needs a community hub in a *town centre* location, recognised and used by the whole community.

This would act as a central point to find local information, a social gathering point – preferably with a community café and



accessible public toilets – and perhaps a small exhibition space for the arts.

One issue that has arisen recently has been the storage of the local Archives, which are presently stored in an inaccessible room in the Town Hall. They are currently being digitised. There has been a suggestion to locate the actual Archives in the Public Library in Reynolds Road, in an added extension.

We understand this logic and the importance of giving our Archives a better home. However, a more coherent strategy might be to bring together Library, Archives and Information Hub to provide a single central point of reference, an easily identifiable place to find town information and showcase community activities. The Town Hall is the obvious place to consider.

### TOWN HALL

As stated in our introduction, the 2009 plan considered the future of the Town Hall and it is disappointing that no progress has been made. Given that the lease for the Hall finishes in 2021, it seems the right time to research carefully the best use of this key town building for the benefit of the community.

The Town Hall is in an ideal location to act as a community hub and we would press for its redevelopment as such to be actively explored as suggested above. The Council Chamber would probably have to be repurposed, but there are plenty of local examples of town councils who do not have such a magnificent room for their meetings.

**Mini-hubs** One issue that the survey raised, and which the working group identified as a problem, is the uneven distribution and lack of coordination between community facilities. The Old Town, in addition to church premises, has the Reading Room on Wycombe End; in the New Town there is the Town Hall, Library and Curzon Centre as well as church halls. Holtspur also has church halls and the Beacon Centre provides some good sporting facilities. There are also Scout huts, a Youth Club building and the Girl Guiding HQ. It is hoped that greater cohesion between these venues will be possible so that each area of town has a ‘mini-hub’ to support the work of the central hub in being a useful source of information.

The Friends of Holtspur Park are working hard to improve the park with the help of the Town Council’s Open Spaces Committee, and have had a real impact. But there is nowhere in Holtspur to gather for a coffee and meet friends inside. (The Hope café is open only on Friday mornings in the Youth Club building.) We believe that if a venue can be found it, it should be possible to encourage further volunteer activity to run a mini-hub café to benefit Holtspur’s community.

The proposed sale of the British Legion building in 2015 is a sad loss to the town. The dissolution of the club in 2014 reflects a trend facing a number of voluntary organisations, namely the inability to find anyone who will take on the running of committees. This reflects a need to rationalise some of the

many community organisations in town and it is to be hoped that there will be the will from within the various groups to do this. If the sale of the British Legion building does go ahead, we trust that other land will be made available for community use.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

7. That a full audit of community facilities be carried out and closer co-collaboration and streamlining of function is encouraged
8. That community groups are encouraged to collaborate and perhaps coalesce, where appropriate, to make the most of the town’s volunteer capacity
9. That a working group is set up to explore the feasibility of creating a central Hub in Beaconsfield, with the Town Hall being the preferred option
10. That sufficient ‘mini-hubs’ are identified and supported in key locations in the town.

### YOUTH FACILITIES

#### Objective C4 To improve provision for the town’s youth

The survey revealed an acknowledgement that young people are poorly served in the town. Comments such as ‘there is little for teenagers’ ‘there is nothing for teenagers unless they have fake ID and can get into Revolutions’ summed up some of these comments. Many of them were linked with the need for better sports facilities as these would appeal to the youth.

Clearly if sporting facilities were increased in town, this would bring disproportionate benefit to our young people and should be encouraged. We have included a recommendation to revive the skate park project above, and note the recent provision of a zip wire and other apparatus at Holtspur Park.

The main youth club in Beaconsfield is the Holtspur Youth Club, which is run from its own building on Holtspur Park. It provides a ‘drop-in’ space where young people can gather and meet friends as well as use the facilities available in the park. Run by a voluntary committee, it has been going for many years and attracts up to 50 youngsters every week.

The Curzon Centre is owned by Bucks County Council and leased to the management committee of the Curzon Centre for a peppercorn rent on the understanding that youth activities are provided. Beaconsfield Young Theatre meets there but their tenure is now in doubt. The management committee has also tried to keep a youth club going. At the moment there is a regular youth club for Years 4–7 (9–12 year olds) but the older age group youth club is in abeyance.

The attempts in recent years to sustain this – using outside agencies such as Street Dreams, and in partnership with the Anglican church youth worker – have not been particularly successful. It is hoped that a new partnership with a youth worker to be employed across the churches will bear better

fruit. But there must at least be a question mark as to whether a town the size of Beaconsfield can sustain two youth clubs serving similar purposes and we believe they need to talk.

A number of the churches, such as the Anglican team and the Hope Church Beaconsfield run their own youth clubs for their own members, though they all actively encourage non-church members to join. There is currently a project across the churches in town to employ a full time youth worker to work across the churches and in local schools to help support youth work in town. At the time of writing, no appointment has yet been made.

There is a small problem with anti-social behaviour in the town. This is by no means restricted to the behaviour of young people, but it has a disproportionate impact on local residents and should not be minimised. Local Community Police Officers work closely with youth and families and it is hoped that the provision of sports and other facilities and the appointment of a youth worker to work in conjunction with County Council Youth workers, will help address the problem.

**RECOMMENDATION**

11. That the Curzon Centre and Holtspur Youth Club work together to assess the need for youth projects in town and carry out a survey with help of other interested stakeholders.

**PROVISION FOR OLDER GENERATIONS**

**Objective C5 To build a town that engages with, benefits from and cares for its older generation**

For our able older population, Beaconsfield has much to offer – and retirees are the mainstay of most of our voluntary organisations. Many belong to Probus or U3A, the National Trust and NADFAS. Other clubs include the Garvin Avenue Over 65 clubs, which meets at the Curzon Centre, Holtspur Senior Citizens and Kiln Court Residents Club. However, many older people need more support and friendship and to feel more connected to the town.

**Lunch club** The Beaconsfield Community Association runs the Thursday luncheon club, which currently attracts between 25 and 30 people each week for lunch at the Curzon Centre. Its numbers have been declining and it hopes to attract new people. Although the volunteers who run the Luncheon Club remain committed to that part of its work, like so many organisations the BCA is struggling to recruit people to its main committee.

**Support to stay at home** The Bucks County Council *Prevention Matters* initiative seeks to support vulnerable old people before they need the intervention of social services. Community Service Workers (CSWs) are employed across the area to provide active intervention to enable people to continue to live

independently. No formal assessment has yet been done to measure how successful this intervention is. Anecdotal evidence suggests certain doctors’ surgeries make better use of the CSWs than others but we hope also that local community groups such as the BCA and churches will support their work.

**Dementia care** This is a priority for the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) but at present there are no specialist dementia Admiral Nurses (who provide similar support to Macmillan Nurses for cancer patients), although this is an issue that the CCG is looking at.

The Alzheimers’ Society initiative to promote dementia-friendly communities is to be welcomed: in an area such as ours where relatively high standards of living lead to greater longevity, and our elderly population set to expand rapidly, the incidence of dementia will only climb. There is an active Alzheimers Society based on the Seeleys Estate just outside the town boundaries, which provides activities such as Singing for the Brain.

**Care homes** There are three care homes in Beaconsfield – Bradbury House, Harrias and Sunrise – offering a total of 151 residential beds, including 24 beds in the specialist dementia unit at Sunrise. There are also five housing complexes in the town offering self-contained accommodation for the over 55s.

However, many senior citizens prefer to stay in their own home if they can. The provision of care at home through local companies such as Universal Care and Home instead, as well as the social services provision, has ensured that this is possible for many Beaconsfield residents. For most, however, the cost is a considerable burden on them and their families. In a relatively affluent town like Beaconsfield, social services provision is extremely limited so those unable to access private care provision have few choices.

**Access to information** Although the rise of the ‘Sliver Surfer’ has been phenomenal in recent years, the proportion of over-65s without access to online facilities is higher than for the general population. The importance of access to good information points in physical buildings is therefore key and underlines the importance of central, accessible information points.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

12. That the Bucks County Council initiative *Prevention Matters* be promoted
13. That the local Community Service Worker is supported in their work by doctors’ surgeries, community groups and other agencies working with the old
14. That the Alzheimers’ Society is encouraged and supported to make Beaconsfield a dementia-friendly community, and to achieve the deployment of an Admiral Nurse for the area
15. That all information for those without access to the Internet is well maintained and available in central physical hubs.

## COMMUNITY COHESION AND ACTION IN TOWN

### Objective C6 To ensure the continued engagement of the towns’ residents and stakeholders in the future of the town

One of the clear consequences of the *Vision for Beaconsfield* project has been the mobilisation of a significant proportion of the town in a desire to see change, which forms the basis of this report. As we have stressed, the delivery of the report’s recommendations is far too great a task to be managed entirely by the Town Hall and indeed many of our proposals are beyond the powers of the Town Council to do anything about.

We believe that the volunteers who have contributed to this research would be keen to see the implementation of its various projects and foresee a role for a management committee of volunteers to work in partnership with the Town Council to enable this. Whether this should be as a separate entity – perhaps under the auspices of a Charitable Incorporated Association (CIO) – or under the umbrella of another community organisation such as the Beaconsfield Society – would need to be explored.

Whilst there is merit in keeping a separate identity and the legal obligations of a CIO are relatively unburdensome and could be maintained, it is also true that the multiplicity of community organisations in Beaconsfield can work to undermine rather than encourage cohesion.

We would strongly encourage the use of the Local Area Forum (LAF) that is already in place as a point where the Town Council and community can communicate and explore ideas. These are described on the Bucks County Council website as including ‘representatives from the County, District and Parish Councils, as well as partner organisations like the police and community associations.’ Currently, of the 19 people listed on the Beaconsfield Forum, only one is not a councillor. There do not appear to be any members representing local community associations.

Given that Bucks County Council has devolved some funds to the LAFs, this seems an obvious forum for community groups and councillors to come together to consider some of the proposals put forward in this report.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

16. That an appropriate structure for the continued existence of the Vision for Beaconsfield project is explored, either as a separate entity such as a CIO or under the auspices of one of the community groups in town
17. That the membership of the Beaconsfield LAF is expanded to enable greater communication between councillors and community
18. That the Town Council consult on the local precept
19. That a Youth Council is created inviting nominees from secondary schools and youth groups

## A VIRTUAL HUB IN BEACONSFIELD

Report by Peter Foster and Rachel Ferguson

### Objective C7 To create a sustainable communication portal that connects, informs and encourages community engagement across town

#### INTRODUCTION

It became quickly apparent from the work carried out in gathering views from local residents and businesses that there is a gap in information provision across the town. The value of being able to pull people together online and offline was first identified in the Communities and Social Working Group but the Local Economy and Blue Skies Working Groups both reached the same conclusion.

There are numerous newsletters, paper information sheets and local magazines run by for-profit and not-for-profit organisations and groups across the town – we have for example, an award-winning Parish magazine. There are also websites run by local and not-so-local groups, both companies and organisations, which provide information, promote events and gather people together online in and around Beaconsfield. Many are excellent voices for the community. However, each has a different remit and so fall short of the overall need identified. A town newsletter was recently raised with the Town Council but dismissed as too costly to print and distribute, and BTC lacks the resources to develop its online news presence fully.

This means we have no central source of information, no one online site to go to go to find out what is happening in town and to identify local opportunities, events, activities and sources of information. For want of a better description, there isn’t a ‘hub’ to the Beaconsfield wheel.

We believe it is time for Beaconsfield to go properly digital, joining those towns and villages already running effective websites for their communities.

Our town can only benefit from having a new, ideally self-funding website that acts as a portal for the whole community with clear links to existing resources and a host of new ones.

The website should inform, link up organisations and connect businesses to customers, and encourage local participation and dialogue so that we all become more informed and engaged citizens. It has a valuable role to play in supporting the local economy and informing visitors, as identified by the Local Economy and Tourism Working Group. And the more engagement we encourage, the more our community will thrive and the greater our sense of belonging will be.

#### A TOWN COUNCIL TWITTER FEED?

Many local towns (Chesham, Amersham, Marlow etc) have highly popular Twitter feeds used to keep residents up to date on local town initiatives. Our current Mayor has his own Twitter account, but currently the Town Council does not have a more

general one due to lack of resources. However we suggest a Lead councillor could be appointed to run an account for a year to test it out.

### PRINCIPLES FOR A VIRTUAL HUB

- The portal should be community-focused and community-led. A wide range of stakeholders, including the Town Council, should be involved in its creation and oversight.
- There should be community oversight of the website to ensure that it remains viable, does not become partisan and supports the whole community
- The site should if possible be self-funding, generating monies to support its management and improvement.
- The website should not seek to supplant other local online resources, but provide clear links to them – whether to local businesses and tradespeople wishing to attract customers or local voluntary organisations wishing to advertise events and attract members
- There should be no charge for listing activities for either voluntary or commercial organisations. However, commercial organisations could pay for additional content or to advertise special offers, etc. helping to generate income to maintain the project
- The website should complement the proposed physical community hub, where information can also be accessed freely by all.

### WHAT THE HUB MIGHT PROVIDE/LINK TO:

- Links to all local societies and organisations and a place on its own pages where they can advertise their events and activities. Ticket selling should also be possible
- Links to relevant Facebook and Twitter accounts both for this site and others.
- A comprehensive list of activity groups for children with the ability to search by day, date, age, price, activity type and drop in versus pre-booked activities
- Volunteer Directory – having a local volunteering directory would help local willing people to get involved in the town and help out by donating their valuable time to excellent local initiatives and groups
- Details of town education and healthcare services eg schools, nurseries, health visitors and weblinks to these where available
- Links to the Town Council website as well as a dedicated space on this site for the Town Council to communicate with residents, eg updating them on the status of the Town Plan
- Links to relevant local authority planning applications, consultations and other information that affects our town's future – these are often very difficult to find on LA websites, to the frustration of residents
- (Links to) opinion polls and online surveys about town matters – eg surveys to support further research for Town Plan initiatives
- Links for local businesses to: potential customers, eg listings for local businesses such as cafes, restaurants, pubs and shops promoting themselves as family-friendly; any local loyalty scheme; business networking sites

- A local recommended trader section with reviews (this works very well informally on Streetlife, for example but is limited in being *ad hoc*)
- Information on the town's social and cultural history
- Maps to guide residents and visitors – eg walking and cycling maps into the countryside and linking historic sites.

### THE WAY FORWARD

Defining the right form for our own virtual hub will take careful thought and further research into useful models. We must bring together a wide range of local groups, organisations, businesses and residents to participate in its development, so that it is not seen as representing only a sector of our community.

Ensuring that the site is run well over the long-term, and does not decline into sluggish activity, is paramount. A community website needs to be clear, current and comprehensive, and interesting enough for people to want to go there. We know from experience and viewing other sites that volunteer-run sites struggle to sustain momentum – and a lack of resources has also restricted the potential of our Town Council site to communicate to residents the good work undertaken by the Council to address local concerns.

We are fully aware of the manpower resources needed to maintain the site, but know from our initial research that it is possible to generate income from such sites sufficient to employ someone to manage it. This will be essential if the site is to thrive.

To support this project and serve the wider communication need, a suggestion is that Beaconsfield Town Council appoint a Communications Lead councillor. This initiative offers a collaborative way forward that will bring our town into line with the most progressive towns and villages.

### RECOMMENDATION

20. That V4B, working with the Town Council, continues its investigations into a sustainable model, bringing together key stakeholders and surveying town opinion to define the right model for our town and prepare an Action Plan for its implementation.

#### Town Hall Chalk Board?

*A suggestion from our Inbox*

Not everyone in town has online access. An 'Old School' solution is a chalk board in the Town Hall foyer, where residents can write suggestions and provide feedback to the Council. It could be a great sign of local engagement, but would of course need careful monitoring!



# APPENDICES

The following Appendices are provided are provided separately as pdf documents:

## **V4B GENERAL:**

### **APPENDICES A–E**

Appendix A	Analysis of Surveys: Report by Alison Eardley
Appendix B	Blue Skies Working Group Report
Appendix C	‘Three Wishes’ Survey Report
Appendix D	SWOT & PESTEL Analyses
Appendix E	Public Art Strategy for the Town

## **TRANSPORT, TRAFFIC AND PARKING:**

### **APPENDICES T1–T4**

Appendix T1	Parking issues in the New Town
Appendix T2	Parking issues in the Old Town
Appendix T3	Provision of additional car parking in Beaconsfield Old and New Towns
Appendix T4	Reduction of congestion in Beaconsfield

## **ENVIRONMENT: NATURAL AND BUILT:**

### **APPENDICES E1–E15**

Appendix E1	Who is responsible for what in the town
Appendix E2	Discussion of potential environmental enhancement
Appendix E3	Environmental issues
Appendix E4	Bilt environment
Appendix E5	Affordability of housing in Beaconsfield
Appendix E6	Property sales in Beaconsfield 2010–2014
Appendix E7	Planning report
Appendix E8	Description of land owned by Beaconsfield Town
Appendix E9	Land ownership map of Beaconsfield
Appendix E10	Land in the catchment area of Beaconsfield
Appendix E11	Common land waste of the manor map
Appendix E12	Development in the town (Tables OD/1–OD/4)
Appendix E13	Environmental documents reviewed
Appendix E14	Photo examples of appropriate new developments and those less in keeping with the town character (4 pdfs)
MAPS	pdfs

## **LOCAL ECONOMY AND TOURISM:**

### **APPENDICES LE1–LE3**

APPENDIX LE1	Comparative survey of local parking schemes
APPENDIX LE2	Comments on local loyalty schemes
APPENDIX LE3	Survey of private and council-led local networks

## **COMMUNITY AND LEISURE:**

### **APPENDICES C1–C5**

Appendix C1	Community buildings in Beaconsfield
Appendix C2	Current sports provision in Beaconsfield
Appendix C3	A multi-sports facility for Beaconsfield: Two case studies
Appendix C4	A multi-use sports facility: Concept
Appendix C5	Arts/community centre and Theatre



## **Vision For Beaconsfield Steering Group Members**

Douglas Butterfield, Chairman

Mike Elliott, Deputy Chair

Gareth Ashington

Jeremy Brooks

Jeanette Buckle

Pete Foster

Roy Foster

Patrick Hogan

Sandy Saunders

Susan Sheahan

Deirdre Smaje



# ***Creating a Better Beaconsfield***

**We want Beaconsfield to retain its character  
as an attractive and prosperous market town,  
enriched by well cared-for public and green spaces;  
proud of its history but open to innovation;  
a stronger and more inclusive community where civic pride is strong  
and where all residents feel connected and able to engage fully  
in decision-making processes to help shape our future.**

A report to Beaconsfield Town Council  
by *Vision for Beaconsfield*  
July 2015

