

## **BRIDPORT LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP (BLAP)**

### **CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22 TO BLAP MEMBERS**

**Presented to the BLAP Annual Assembly held on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2022**

Dear Members,

Another year come and gone, though thankfully 2021/22 proved to be less disrupted than its predecessor, despite the lingering pandemic. BLAP ran close to a full schedule of meetings, albeit these continued to be held online. Where would we have been without Zoom and the like? That said, I'm pleased that we are at last restarting some face-to-face meetings, as evidenced by this BLAP Annual Assembly – our first such event since 2019.

I'd like to thank everyone who has engaged with and contributed to the Partnership over this last year, bringing and sharing a wide range of knowledge and perspectives. I can't stress often enough that the Bridport Local Area Partnership is and exists for its members. Moreover, most of those who contributed have done so in a voluntary capacity. We estimate that, in one way or another, volunteers contributed an impressive 775 hours to BLAP meetings and activities over the year.

I should like to take the opportunity to pay particular thanks to a few people. To Chris Everidge, my Vice Chair, and to those others who sit on the BLAP Management Team. They are Maureen Jackson, Dave Rickard, John Firrell, Charles Wild, Rovarn Wickremasinghe and Richard Nicholls. It has been a great pleasure to welcome both Rovarn and John onto that Team during the past year.

As most of you know, BLAP receives its administrative support from Bridport Town Council. This is crucial for its smooth operation and I would like to put on record my special thanks to Claire Peters-Way who tirelessly and efficiently organises meetings, produces minutes from them, follows up actions and produces the fortnightly BLAP Bulletin. In short, BLAP things mostly happen because of Claire. Then, last but by no means least, my thanks go to Will Austin, the Town Clerk, who I've found to be unfailingly knowledgeable and a great person to turn to for wise advice.

Throughout 2021/22 the Management Team carried out a review of BLAP – its purpose, its structure and its ways of working. When I wrote last year's Annual Report we were starting that process by circulating a survey to BLAP members, to seek views. As I write this Annual Report that review is almost concluded, and a revised Protocol (or governance document) will go to our next Steering Group meeting, hopefully for sign-off.

That review has been an opportunity to reflect and to update aspects of the Partnership. In so doing, we have clarified the BLAP objectives, which are:

- Enabling members to share their knowledge and experiences;
- Assisting better coordination among organisations which deliver services;
- Providing Parish Councils opportunities to work together on issues of joint interest;
- Identifying and facilitating actions which could be taken locally to meet needs; and
- Giving local communities more of a voice to influence decisions about the area.

As you may know, most of the funding which pays for BLAP's administrative support and other costs is now provided by Bridport Town Council and I should like to express my real gratitude for that. However, one outcome from the BLAP review, which I welcome, is that thirteen Parish Councils, who are members of BLAP, agreed to contribute towards our running costs in 2022/23. I thank each of them for that.

During 2021/22 the BLAP Parish Liaison Group met six times, enabling its Parish Council representatives to share information and to meet with Dorset Council officers on topics such as the community governance review, the review of car parking charges, and emergency and resilience planning. The last of these directly benefitted Parish Councils beginning work on or updating their Emergency and Resilience Plans, not least in response to last Winter's extreme weather events. Meetings of the Parish Liaison Group were also organised with Chris Loder MP and with Councillor Laura Miller, who is the Dorset Council portfolio holder for communities. The latter proved a useful opportunity to discuss improving communications from and engagement with the unitary authority.

Our BLAP Health and Wellbeing Working Group, chaired by Maureen Jackson, engaged with the Ammonite Health Partnership (which manages Bridport Medical Centre – as well as the GP surgeries at Beaminster and Maiden Newton), encouraging it to make progress with establishing a new and differently structured Patient Participation Group, so that primary health services are informed by the experiences and ideas of their patients.

Our BLAP Homelessness Working Group, chaired by Chris Everidge, helped to link-up and share information among organisations that provide support to those without shelter or with urgent housing needs in the local area. It has also maintained contact with Dorset Council over its plans to create temporary accommodation at West Rivers House in the town. And, recently, it has explored what services are available for those who experience domestic abuse.

BLAP was also invited onto and played an active part in several external groups. During the last year we have been represented on the Foundry Lea Stakeholders Working Group, the Dorset Council Car Parking Review Group, the Bridport Market and Town Centre Liaison Group and the area's Local Advice Network. As referenced above, we attended, too, a meeting of the Dorset Domestic Abuse Forum.

Furthermore, we have established new contact with the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership, with broadband network operator Jurassic Fibre and (of course) with the Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner. In each case it is hoped this gives an opportunity to engage about the needs of the BLAP area, both in the town and in the smaller parishes.

On six occasions we responded to public consultation exercises. These were on Dorset Council car parking charges, the Dorset homelessness strategy, Dorset harbours, Dorset libraries, the Bridport Town Council access and movement study, and the Foundry Lea reserved matters planning application. BLAP was pleased to be able to support a seventh response, submitted by WATAG – the Dorset Western Area Transport Action Group – when it replied to the draft Dorset Bus Service Improvement Plan. Of course, we have also used the BLAP Bulletin to make members aware of many consultations which might be of interest to them.

In short, through various means during 2021/22 BLAP has sought to engage across a range of policies, strategies and other developments which will impact the local area and its communities. It is clear from our meetings that there is a wide and evolving list of topics of interest, though some seem to crop up with regularity, including transport and roads, climate change and resilience, the planning system (and development control), digital connectivity and the ability to recruit volunteers. Doubtless this list could be expanded.

I look forward to working with you again in 2022/23 (subject – I hasten to add – to my being re-elected as BLAP Chair). Whilst we must, of course, operate within our available time and resources, BLAP will continue to seek opportunities to add value: by enabling networking and information sharing; by helping groups to link up and coordinate; and by building new contacts and highlighting local needs.

**Brian Wilson**  
**Chair, Bridport Local Area Partnership**  
**April 2022**