

BRIDPORT LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP (BLAP)

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23 TO BLAP MEMBERS

Presented to the BLAP Annual Assembly held on 23rd May 2023

Dear Members,

It is my pleasure to present another Annual Report, summarising the Partnership's activities throughout the year just gone – that is, covering the period from April 2022 to March 2023 inclusive. I hope I can say, with confidence, that those activities have added value and brought real benefit to BLAP members. That has certainly been the aim.

I should start by thanking all those who took part in and contributed to Partnership activities over this last year. It is, of course, the willingness of so many to share information, local perspectives and ideas that makes partnership working possible and worthwhile.

BLAP is a broad Partnership with a membership of more than eighty organisations and groups, representing the statutory, private, voluntary and community sectors. Whilst all members are equally valued, I'm conscious and acknowledge that many take part on a voluntary basis. Our best estimate is that more than 750 volunteer hours were contributed during 2022/23, an amount which can be valued at around £11,700.

That includes most of those who sit on the BLAP Management Team and who I wish to thank for all their support and advice. They are Chris Everidge (Vice Chair), Dave Rickard, John Firrell, Rovarn Wickremasinghe, Charles Wild and Richard Nicholls.

Particular mention is due to Claire Peters-Way, who provides our administrative support. In fact, doesn't just 'provide' it, but does so with real efficiency, timeliness, tact and initiative. You will have seen some of that in action every time you receive the BLAP Bulletin or receive papers for upcoming meetings or see notes recording those meetings. I can assure you that Claire does much more, too, some of it perhaps less visible.

I should also like to say thank you to Will Austin, the Bridport Town Clerk, who I often turn to for information, contacts and a second opinion, all of which are willingly offered. He is a mine of knowledge.

Indeed, I must add my gratitude to the Town Council for the funding it provided towards the administration and other costs that BLAP incurs. Whilst those costs are relatively modest, we could not have operated without that provision. Similarly, that gratitude must extend to the thirteen Parish Councils in BLAP membership, all of whom agreed to make a funding contribution during 2022/23 (and all of whom have agreed to do so again for 2023/24).

At its first meeting of the year (2022/23), the BLAP Steering Group signed off a revised Protocol, which is the Partnership's governance document. This – amongst other things – updated the stated purposes of the Partnership and put all member organisations onto an equal footing (moving away from a previous two-tier system).

Another development, later in the year, was the re-establishment of BLAP's Health and Wellbeing Working Group, which I am delighted to say has active engagement from bodies such as Public Health Dorset, Jurassic Coast PCN Social Prescribing Team, Age UK Dorset, Healthwatch Dorset and Bridport & District Citizens Advice. As a first project, that group has been exploring the availability of NHS dental care in the area.

Our Homelessness Working Group, chaired by Chris Everidge, enabled information sharing and networking amongst organisations like Julian House, the Pilsdon Community, Shelter (Dorset), St Swithun's Church and Bridport Community Kitchen. It gave advice to the latter about its wish to locate a pod or pods within Bridport for emergency shelter. Chris also built useful contacts with the local Domestic Violence Group and Bridport Veterans Group.

Meanwhile, our Parish Liaison Group met six times over the year, receiving presentations from the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership, Jurassic Fibre, Dorset Council's planning enforcement team, the Primary Care Network's Social Prescribing Team and Dorset Council's road safety team (about 20 mph zones). A further meeting was organised to give Parish Councils a chance to comment on the draft Bridport Investment Plan.

It is also worth noting that BLAP analysed 2021 Census data about the Parishes in its area, producing a short report which highlighted key characteristics, and which provided an up-to-date evidence base that could prove valuable, in future, if grant applications are made or the case for better services is put.

As chair of BLAP I was pleased to contribute at various other local meetings or groups, two directly related to the cost-of-living crisis. Those meetings informed the creation of a local Hardship Fund and the establishment of Warm Hubs over the Winter period. Other forums that I regularly attended include the Foundry Lea Working Group, the Local Advice Network and the Bridport Town Centre Working Group.

During 2022/23 the BLAP Management Team submitted a response to five consultations, which were on the Foundry Lea reserved matters planning application, the Bridport Streetscape & Heritage Project, the Dorset Council Libraries Strategy, the Bridport Investment Plan and a revised planning application for the St Michael's Trading Estate.

We also manned stalls at the Bridport Community Charter Fair and the Melplash Show in 2022, these being an opportunity to explain the Partnership to a wider public, to hear views about local issues and to promote an array of leaflets from our member organisations.

In conclusion, I thank you all for your contributions to BLAP activities and your continuing support now during 2022/23. Going forward, I have little doubt there are and will be plenty of local issues to monitor or question and (hopefully) some opportunities too. These will often, surely, be better approached through partnership working.

Brian Wilson
Chair, Bridport Local Area Partnership