

BRIDPORT LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24 TO BLAP MEMBERS

Presented to the BLAP Annual Assembly held on 23rd May 2024

Dear Members,

It is a pleasure to present this Annual Report, which looks back (albeit briefly) on the Partnership's activities and efforts over the year that ran from April 2023 to March 2024.

BLAP works (only) because a great many organisations, groups and individuals contribute their time, experience and ideas so generously. Last year we had over eighty Partnership members, representing a wide range of charitable bodies, voluntary groups, parish councils and other statutory and business interests. Sincere thanks are due to all of them.

Each year we estimate, as best we can, the time that is given voluntarily towards Partnership activities. During the year 2023/24 that amounted to some 750 hours, which can be valued at £12,500.

Special thanks are, of course, due to those who sat on the Partnership's Management Team. Last year they were Dave Rickard, John Firrell, Charles Wild, Rovarn Wickremasinghe and (for much of the year) Chris Everidge and Richard Nicholls. Chris, it should be added, was also Vice Chair until she decided to stand down. The Management Team is delighted to have been joined by Sylvia Stafford from the start of the current year.

I must also single out Claire Peters-Way and Will Austin from Bridport Town Council. Claire, as many of you will know, provides our administrative support, though that phrase seems to understate her contribution. Always organised and proactive, the extra value that she brings to the role is hugely appreciated by me and, I know, many others. Will, too, as Town Clerk, has been terrifically supportive and so often provided positive suggestions and wise counsel.

Despite all the volunteer effort, the Partnership requires a small budget to keep it going, not least to cover its administrative costs. I should like to express my gratitude that, once again, Bridport Town Council generously covered the majority of those costs. We were, though, also fortunate that all thirteen Parish Councils in membership in 2023/24 agreed to make a financial contribution. So, particular thanks go to them, too.

Turning now to some activities from last year, our Parish Liaison Group held meetings which were attended by constituency MP Chris Loder, Dorset AONB on river management, Dorset Community Energy on local energy production, Bridport & District Citizens Advice on cost-of-living support, Highways England on A35 road management, Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils on councillor recruitment and Dorset Council on flood prevention/mitigation.

Our Health and Wellbeing Working Group, meanwhile, completed a project into local provision of NHS dentistry (which featured on the Bridport News front page) and explored the possibility of bringing a mobile dental service to the area. The Group has also worked with the local NHS Social Prescribing Team, researching befriending services for vulnerable or isolated residents and gaps in their provision. It has since been in talks with partner organisations to see if they might be enhanced.

Our Homelessness Working Group also met through most of the year, helping agencies and voluntary groups who offer support services to share information. This achieved regular engagement from the Dorset Council homeless outreach team. For all that, we have paused its operation, partly due to disappointing attendance and partly given the loss of the group's chair. We will soon be considering whether a group with a wider remit (of housing need, homelessness and poverty) could prove more valuable and sustainable.

During the 2023/24 year the Management Team submitted responses to eight consultations, which were on the Dorset Coast Strategy, Dorset Housing Strategy, Dorset Local Transport Plan, Bridport Climate Emergency Action Plan Review, Bridport Food Security Plan, Bridport 20 mph zone, Churchill Homes retirement village and (national) planning policy for short-term let properties.

As Partnership Chair, I also attended and contributed at meetings run by various other local groups over the year. These included the Bridport Market and Business Liaison Group, the Foundry Lea Working Group, Bridport Chamber of Commerce and the inaugural Community Links meeting for local VCSE groups.

We also had a stand at the popular Bridport Community Charter Fair in May 2023 where, amongst other things, we promoted leaflets and literature from many of our member organisations. It again proved a useful opportunity for us to meet the public.

Indeed, helping promote the work of and events run by our members is a key Partnership function and is, perhaps, most visibly done through the fortnightly bulletin that we circulate, which we know from feedback is widely valued.

The year ended with some substantial parish boundary changes in our area. I should therefore like to thank three Parish Councils which had been long-term BLAP members, being those for Bradpole, Bothenhampton & Walditch and Allington. They, of course, have now been subsumed within an expanded Bridport Town and, in one case, a recast Symondsburry Parish.

We are fortunate to have so many active groups and organisations in the Bridport area, though the challenges faced are undoubtedly many and varied, too. It's great that so many of them are Partnership members. I and the Management Team look forward to working with you, again, over the coming year and hope that we can add some real value to your work and activities.

Brian Wilson
Chair, Bridport Local Area Partnership