

St Albans Rural Vision Final Report: Comments from the Management Committee of Bricket Wood Residents' Association

Rural Vision for St Stephen Parish

The Management Committee of Bricket Wood Residents' Association are disappointed with the St Albans Rural Vision final report for St Stephen Parish by Urban Practitioners. In our opinion, the research appears poor and there are some key errors and omissions in the report in respect of St Stephen Parish.

Page 12

M10 should read A414

add A405 as it is a strategic road (there is no southerly slip between M25 and M1 so the A405 at Bricket Wood is the motorway interchange, used by motorway as well as local traffic).

See below for our comments on the Vision Statement for St Stephen Parish.

Page 19

Add to the list of Key natural and green assets

15 Bricket Wood Common SSSI

16 Moor Mill Gravel pits and open grassland SSSI

Page 67

The population figures are questionable - the breakdowns for Bricket Wood 4000, Chiswell Green 2800, Park Street 7000 and How Wood 1000 do not come close to the total figure of 23000 even taking account of smaller population areas and scattered dwellings in the parish?

M10 is now the A414

Abbey Flyer does not have a Station at Frogmore.

We think the following need to be added to the description of St Stephen Parish

- in the Watling Chase Community Forest area,
- has some of the most valuable wildlife sites in Hertfordshire (Hertfordshire Biological Record Centre) with two SSSI - Bricket Wood Common and land north of M25 between Park Street Lane and Watling Street,
- wide network of footpaths and bridleways attracts walkers, cyclists and horse riders (well used by local people and numerous visitors from wider area including from north London).

Bricket Wood only information given in the report is the population figure and Hanstead House now being the HSBC training centre (actually HSBC Group Management Training College). We would suggest the following should be added:

- BRE (Building Research Establishment) especially as it is identified in the Emerging Core Strategy as a possible site for both housing (150 dwellings) and employment development.
- Bricket Wood has one school Mount Pleasant Lane JMI School, and four pubs Blackboy PH, The Gate PH, Fox and Hounds PH and The Old Fox PH (all other villages have numbers or names of schools and pubs listed, why not Bricket Wood?).
- The Conservation Area of 'Old Bricket' on School Lane (It is noteworthy that Park Street and Frogmore Conservation Area apparently warrants the whole of page 68 in the report yet the Conservation Area along School Lane does not appear to be mentioned anywhere in the document?)

Following are optional additions as they are small areas of woodland but key local projects

- Blackgreen Wood - purchased by St Stephen Parish Council to protect and enhance this remaining area ancient woodland which is believed to have once covered Bricket Wood - a noticeable number of old oak trees still remain in the village.
- Hanstead Wood - local volunteers planted over 3000 trees on land owned by HSBC and local Bricket Wood community manage and maintain the woodland under the direction of Countryside Management Services. Hanstead Wood is open to the public with access from Bricket Wood Sports Centre car park (although Sports Centre is due to close in 2010).

Page 73

There are a couple of points worth clarifying on the A1 map:

- The bridleway identified and marked on the map is actually a bridleway **with** a suitable surface for all users (probably funded by Sustrans for cyclists).

At the Drop in Session a group of us from Bricket Wood estimated at least 500 horses are now kept within hacking distance of the 'water meadows' at the confluence of Ver/Colne rivers and we were talking about the importance of a suitable surface for horses on allbridleways. This particular bridleway was mentioned as a good surface and an example that should be applied to other bridleways, some of which are in poor condition - on hearing this one of the Consultancy staff asked us to mark it on the A1 map.

- We query the wording on the A1 map north of the word "M25". This is the Moor Mill gravel pits and open fields that are an SSSI and Green Belt. The wording "retain as parkland" and "Site for Groundwork Trust" makes sense but the land on which the word "housing" is written would not be an appropriate site for housing. Should the word "housing" be linked to the words "Potential for infill development" or does it refer to "housing" along the frontage of Watling Street?

Consultation Drop In event in Bricket Wood

The timing of the Drop In event in Bricket Wood was not ideal as 6 - 7.30 pm is usual 'mealtime' for many working people and families. It was on the same evening as the Annual Parish Meeting, which started later at 8 pm. In reality, we would suggest that the Drop In Event was "relatively well attended, particularly in Bricket Wood" (Page 70) because we made the effort to go!

The A1 worksheets with themed headings were almost blank when we arrived and consequently the vast majority of suggestions and comments for St Stephen Parish were written by Bricket Wood participants.

Incidentally, it was only when reading the Rural Vision report that we understood the purpose of the A1 map was to annotate with "specific issues or suggestions for improvement" and we do not recall this being explained to us at the Drop In session.

Vision statement for St Stephen Parish

The Vision statement (Page 12), in our view, does not show much understanding of the qualities of the Parish and does not appear to reflect the contributions at the brief consultation events or feedback forms.

We question the priority and emphasis that Butterfly World is given in the first paragraph. *"St Stephen Parish stands to benefit significantly from the development of Butterfly World"*
"to provide local jobs":

Butterfly World may provide local jobs, although many are likely to be seasonal which is not ideal in an area of relatively high employment, expensive housing with a shortage of affordable housing etc.

"and encourage visitors to the area":

The expected visitor numbers given by Butterfly World vary widely from 250,000 (planning application), 750,000 (Travel Plan) to over one million (presentation at BWRA Open Meeting). There are only two references to Butterfly World in the suggestions/comments (Page 71):

1) Community and Leisure "good links to St Albans" and

2) Traffic and Transport "traffic and transport was not properly considered, potential for highway congestion considerable". The impact of the higher visitor numbers travelling by car and coach on an already busy road network were not considered by the Highway Authorities because they were unaware of them at the planning stage. Other suggestions and comments can also be related to Butterfly World traffic i.e. the impact of increased traffic on the residential slip road Junction 6 M1 south (Page 71), M1 motorway noise (Page 71) and 'non motorway user crossings on A405' (Page 72). It is reasonable to suggest that the more successful Butterfly World is in attracting visitors the greater the disadvantages of extra traffic and other pressures (such as need for additional car and coach parking on green field Green Belt land, affordable accommodation for seasonal staff, hotel space for visitors etc.).

Butterfly World was not mentioned on the feedback forms.

The final summary paragraph on Page 72 states that *"Butterfly World was considered a benefit for the local area"* but the Drop in suggestions/comments or feedback forms do not support this statement. The "benefit" is then developed further in the Vision Statement to the *"St Stephen Parish stands to benefit significantly from the development of Butterfly World"*. We understand the consultation was with residents and St Stephen Parish Council had no input - **whose 'vision' for St Stephen Parish is this?**

Suggestions for the Vision statement for St Stephen Parish

We agree with the second paragraph of the Vision statement (Page 12). However, we suggest the vision should also seek to improve local amenities/facilities with the following wording:

*"The separate settlements will provide for everyday needs, **creating and enhancing facilities that are easy to access** and develop community hubs accordingly, to strengthen the roles of the local centres".*

We would suggest the Vision statement should reflect the importance of the Green Belt policy to the Parish and include an aspiration relating to the exceptional wildlife sites mentioned above and the Parish's location in the Watling Chase Community Forest. We recommend the following paragraph should be added to the Vision statement for St Stephen Parish:

Protect the Green Belt to maintain the separation between settlements and retain countryside around the villages. Enhance and encourage extension of the valuable wildlife sites and woodland in the parish; carefully balanced with maintaining, safeguarding and improving access for leisure activities in the countryside such as walking, cycling and horse-riding.

Future priorities for St Stephen Parish

We request that the following "Future priority" is added

Reducing noise and air pollution from the M1 and M25, in particular the effect of the noise generated by the concrete surface on the M1 between Junction 5 and 6a at Bricket Wood.

District Rural Vision

"The rural areas and communities within the District will be enhanced through the promotion of sustainable measures to boost the local economy and increase integration. (Page 15)"

We are concerned that including "rural areas will be enhanced" and "to boost the local economy" in the same sentence increases the pressure for development of the rural areas.

We would expect the District Rural Vision to express the importance of protecting the Green Belt and include aspirations for the natural environment (nature conservation, wildlife habitat, biodiversity etc) as well as opportunities for leisure and peaceful recreation in the countryside.

Submitted on behalf of the Management Committee, Bricket Wood Residents' Association