

Introduction

Stockbridge Parish Council (SPC) embarked on a detailed investigation of the different planning options that were available at parish level; namely a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), an updated Village Design Statement (VDS), and consultation with the TVBC Emerging Local Plan (LP). It was decided that a NDP was not suitable for Stockbridge due to the focus being on 'development', and due to the policies already in force in the LP, the focus would be on allocating land outside of the existing settlement boundary for new development. Due to the location of Stockbridge in the valley base, and being surrounded by ecologically sensitive countryside, 4 SSSI's (The Common Marsh, the River Test, Stockbridge Fen and Stockbridge Downs), being in a floodplain and the area immediately surrounding the settlement boundary being the remains of a complex system of beadwork system water meadows and therefore being an important heritage asset, there is no suitable land outside of the existing settlement boundary to allocate for new development

The decision of the Parish Council was to update our VDS, and to consult with TVBC on the Emerging Local Plan.

Stockbridge Tourism

Stockbridge is a destination centre and the beauty and uniqueness attracts tourists locally from all over the UK, and from around the world. Tourists come to enjoy the charm of a small town, its mix of historic buildings, range of independent shops and restaurants, and to walk the surrounding countryside. There are numerous shoots on local estates, and organisers that offer fishing breaks locally, with Stockbridge being a key provider of accommodation for these visitors.

Stockbridge Key Service Centre

SPC do not feel that Stockbridge is a key service centre in the same way that the nearby towns of Andover and Romsey, and the cities of Winchester and Salisbury are. Stockbridge has little more in the way of services than several other local settlements. The services Stockbridge has can be defined as having a shop for day to day groceries (the co-op), a doctor's surgery, and a primary school. Test Valley school is within the Longstock Parish, the dental surgery is private and does not accept NHS patients, and the remaining shops are considered specialist shops rather than those that serve the everyday needs of a population. In addition, due to the poor public transport network all users of the above local services are reliant on private vehicles and so are just as likely to drive to larger towns with better services.

For this reason, SPC believe that the focus for the future of Stockbridge should be as a tourist destination rather than as a local service centre. Tourism is well established locally and the facilities are already in place to serve these needs with three public houses serving food and providing guest rooms, a hotel, and some of these establishments offer country pursuits such as fishing and shooting on local estates. The recent expansion in guest room numbers at two of the four establishments illustrates the demand for guest accommodation in Stockbridge.

The Test Valley Corporate Plan has a focus on town centres, but this focus is on Andover and Romsey and not Stockbridge which suggests this distinction has already been made by TVBC.

Heritage

SPC have read the excellent report written by Save Our Stockbridge (SOS) and we fully endorse the contents, and a copy of this has been annexed to our response as we understand that the report has already been submitted to TVBC for their consideration.

SOS have investigated the former water meadows in Stockbridge and concluded that the remaining system is reasonably well preserved. It appears that the complex system of channels and ditches has escaped ploughing, with only a couple of small sections lost to development, many of the drainage channels can still be seen today from aerial photography, and LiDAR imaging.

The water meadows are outside of the Settlement Boundary and are within designated countryside. However, SPC agree that the water meadows should be given further recognition and protection due to not only their important heritage contribution, the ecologically sensitive wildlife that thrive in these areas, but also the important part they play in flood prevention.

Climate change is arguably the most important issue we are faced with in modern times. In the past we have been aware of climate change, and knew it was something to be addressed, but it was never treated as a priority. This time of complacency has now passed and SPC are encouraged that climate change is one of the key areas of focus in the TVBC Next Local Plan. SPC feel it is important to make the distinction between tackling climate change and finding a stable and sustainable way forward, and addressing the current resulting issues of climate change, namely extreme weather conditions and the increased risk of flooding.

Flooding

Flooding is a key issue for Stockbridge due to the settlement laying in the base of a valley, the River Test that runs the west end of the settlement, and the numerous channels that run across the High Street, and to the north and south of the High Street. The two types of flooding that Stockbridge is at risk from are ground water flooding, flooding caused by long periods of rainfall which increases the height of the water table, and flash flooding, which occurs during a torrential rainstorm. Properties on the north side of the High Street are at particular risk of flooding due primarily to the camber in the road and an outdated and inadequate drainage system. Most of these properties are very old and some have internal floor levels lower than the pavements which makes them very vulnerable to any amount of water that the drainage system cannot cope with. Even if the drainage system can cope with the amount of rain water, drains simply being blocked with discarded rubbish, plastic carrier bags and straw/hay (from the farm machinery that travels through Stockbridge, particularly at harvest time) can dramatically affect their functionality and risk properties flooding.

The aforementioned SOS evidence based, and factual led work regarding the risk of flooding to Stockbridge details not only the risk that Stockbridge currently faces, but the increased risk of new development being built on the water meadows and the western valley side. Without attempting to reiterate the SOS report, both areas flood at times of heavy rain and developing these sites would further increase the risk of flooding on the existing settlement. The chalk valley sides act as a natural filter for rainwater and developing the valley sides would remove this natural layer of protection and force more water into the valley base i.e. to Stockbridge. A few houses to the north of the High Street flooded in 2014 and one had to be demolished and rebuilt due to the flooding which illustrates a very real risk. Further flood defences have been installed since 2014, but these are no way a guarantee that flooding would never happen but are certainly an additional layer of protection.

Extreme weather conditions caused by climate change are measurably different each year; from temperatures at their highest since records began, and the more ever more common occurrence of a month's worth of rain falling in one day. The flash flooding seen in Winchester in August 2020 illustrates the damage and devastation that heavy rain can cause. Many shops were damaged and caused thousands of pounds worth of damage, and homes were also affected with flood water and sewage being forced back up through domestic sinks and lavatories etc.

New Development

Notwithstanding the above focus on tourism, heritage assets and climate change/flooding, SPC recognise that Stockbridge will inevitably need to provide some new development to suit local needs, but SPC stress that this focus should be incremental, and respect the many sensitivities of Stockbridge. At the time of writing there has been recent outline permission given for 3 new homes, a site containing 4 new homes are at application stage, and a separate site containing 1 new home is also at application stage, and all of these applications sites are within the settlement boundary. There have been a few new homes built in recent years and combined with the above potential 8 new homes, SPC feel that this provision reflects a positive and incremental expansion when considering the size of the population. It is also worth noting that of a population of 561 in 2020, this number is expected to decrease slightly by 0.7% to 557. We are adamant that the existing settlement boundary should be protected, and that no development should be considered outside of this envelope.

Parking

Parking has always been an issue for Stockbridge, primarily a subject of debate as to how it should be addressed. When speaking to longstanding residents, parking issues in some shape or form have been about since at least the 1950's and so it's not a new or recent subject for Stockbridge. SPC's Parking Working Group have been doing a lot of work on the subject and following a survey of High Street residents it was established that most residents and businesses value the free parking available on the High Street. The working group are creating a bespoke scheme for Stockbridge; one which protects the free unlimited parking, but most importantly, a scheme that makes efficient use of the available parking spaces instead of trying to create more elsewhere. The council has met with the working group and supports the creation of a bespoke scheme as it recognises a settlement and retail area that is unique to the Borough.

An issue that Stockbridge faces is the impact on parking of new developments and conversions that cannot provide adequate parking spaces on site. TVBC have historically been of the view that if a development site cannot provide enough on-site parking, this can be displaced onto the High Street as it is considered the unrestricted parking is adequate. This is evidently not the case because the parking allocation is not ceaseless and over time as businesses expand, and sites are redeveloped, the effect is not just a few extra cars that have nowhere to park except the High Street, but the cumulative reality of there being many additional cars.

SPC ask that TVBC review this policy and consider the wider impact of parking on Stockbridge as a whole and that they work with SPC's Parking Working Group to discuss the most up to date position.

