

Village meeting presentation, 15th January 2018

Slide 1: The opening picture is a view across to the Mendips from the Barbury in 1789

The reason for calling the meeting

- *There has been mounting concern that the Lower Road hedge is just being allowed to grow.*
- *That the hedging and trees along the Cam are not being maintained.*
- *And that the open views in and out of the village are being closed in.*

Slide 2: Background

Here's a brief history of Hinton Blewett and its views. There have been occasions and events that have had an impact on the views surrounding Hinton Blewett.

- Roman occupation
- Medieval Planned village, bounded by Upper and Lower Roads
- Conservation Area Character Appraisal
- Placemaking Plan Character Assessment
- Rees-Mogg planning application for 19 houses
- Rees-Mogg field designated Important Green Space

Romans: Even before Roman occupation there was an Iron Age settlement here and evidence of the existence of a former Saxon ditch and palisade site. Although loss of our forests was blamed on the Romans much of it had been cut down by early Britons before the Romans set foot here. When the Domesday Book was completed in 1086 just 15% of the country was still wooded.

Medieval Planned Village: There has been a settlement here for probably 1500 years or more. With the commencement of field enclosures in the 17thC much of our landscape here was thought to have been open.

More recently the Hinton Blewett Conservation Area Character Appraisal, the Placemaking Plan Character Assessment and the Rees Mogg have had a significant impact on our landscape.

Slide 3: Map of medieval planned village

Whilst we don't have a medieval map of the village, the settlement, as you know it, is partly linear in form which suggests a medieval layout. This map from 1826 shows the parallel lines of Upper Road and Lower Road which is the location of the original tracks that formed what is known as a planned village in the Middle Ages.

Slide 4: Hinton Blewett Conservation Area Character Appraisal document – adopted by B&NES 2014

A number of villages in NE Somerset have done design or village statements in the past. In about 2009 The Parish Council consulted with B&NES and under their guidance Rosemary Walker and Liz Brimmell started to compile information for a character appraisal of the village. We were lucky to be offered help by a Masters student doing work experience at B&NES and he completed what became the Conservation Area Character Appraisal. Reference to the open aspect of the village is mentioned in the Character Appraisal which refers to the village's elevated position affording extensive view of the surrounding landscape. It also refers to the importance of the views back towards the village from the south and east.

Slide 5: Placemaking Plan document – adopted by B&NES 2017

The Placemaking Plan: Thanks to the help of 12 village volunteers we were able to participate in the Plan which was a B&NES initiative in response to a Government push for more housing. It enabled those parishes that had carried out a character assessment of their village to suggest possible sites for new housing, rather than have B&NES foist new housing sites on us. This happened back in 2013 when the Hinton Blewett Parish Council was asked to identify all the open spaces in the village, and to justify whether the sites were important because of the views they offered or whether, if supported by

landowners, they were potential building sites. Hinton Blewett was asked to find sites for 10-15 dwellings. Subsequently we were lucky to be deemed to be pretty much unsustainable which is why only Mike Bird's site was allowed. The Character Assessment records the importance of the landscape with the southerly open aspect along Lower Road being regarded as the prime view both outwards and inwards.

Slide 6: Rees-Mogg planning application refused 2014

Then there was the Rees-Mogg planning application was for 19 houses with 8 terraced houses lined up along Lower Road. There was huge village opposition to the application and it was refused, as was a subsequent application for 8 dwellings also refused.

Slide 7: Rees-Mogg field/green space – Designated an Important Green Space 2017

As part of doing the Character Assessment for the Placemaking Plan we were asked to identify important views and if it could be justified to put them forward for nomination as Important Green Spaces. We put forward 4 and 3 sites were subsequently designated. It was great news when we were told that the site covering the fields from Litton Lane along to and including the Rees-Mogg field had been designated an Important Green Space. With that designation it means it should never be built on.

Slide 8: Lower Road hedge, before and now

So last autumn we contacted the Rees-Mogg's agent to ask if the hedge could be restored back to its historical height, level with the adjoining hedge, approx 1.5m above road level. Pointing out that restoring the hedge down to that level allows residents whether on foot, cycling or driving by to enjoy the open aspect of the village which reinforces the sense of history for Hinton Blewett as a planned medieval village.

Slide: 9: Aerial views 1975, 1991 and 2017

We also raised concerns about the extensive vegetation growth that has taken place alongside Cam Brook on the south side of the Rees-Moggs' field as well as adjacent fields to the east which have not been maintained in recent years. The Conservation Area Character Appraisal which was compiled in the previous decade states that no significant woodland or development obscures the open vistas that accentuate the sense of rural isolation. However since then the boundary vegetation has been allowed to grow apace, some of the trees are dead and fallen and a number of broken branches further obscure the views. The Appraisal also states that careful thought should be given to the protection and enhancement of key views.

So the openness and importance of our views is well documented in B&NES planning policies affecting Hinton Blewett

The Rees-Mogg's agent response was unco-operative but he did express mild interest in what we might propose doing about it.

We are therefore wondering how many of you would support trying to keep our landscapes open.

We have costed hedge laying, raising of tree head height and clearance of dead wood along the Cam. We also have been told that the Mendip Hill AONB have a hedge laying team which would be keen to make improvements to the Limestone Link, which coincidentally runs along the Cam. So the hedge laying won't cost us anything. If we were to add the cost of the tree works to the Parish Council budget, it would add £2.65 for the year 2018-19 for a Band D property to the Parish Council element of the Council Tax or 5p per week. If there were volunteers to help with the tree work, there could be a cost saving in return for some logs!

We've been led to understand that the current tenant of the Rees-Mogg field is not enthusiastic about the concerns of the village regarding the Lower Road hedge,

If the feeling is that the Parish Council should budget for the cost of the tree work, we would hope that we could put sufficient pressure on the Rees-Moggs that they might feel sufficiently uncomfortable for not contributing to the landscape clearance and that we might get their co-operation for lowering Lower Road hedge. We could of course also consider raising the issue with the press. It could make quite a nice story or maybe we could go to our MP, Jacob, for support.