

Making Blandford Special

Executive Summary

The event at the Crown Hotel on 19th October was attended by 75 people from across Blandford and the DT11 area, including reps from more than 40 local organisations and businesses, the Mayor, the High Sheriff of Dorset, church leaders, Dorset Council, Dorset Police, health champions and Public Health Dorset.

The event highlighted the astonishing range and vibrancy of grass roots community activity. But it also gave this cross-section of community advocates a chance to identify key issues that would improve life in the Blandford area – these are the top issues that they identified together with a proposed first set of actions:

- **“Information about what’s out there”**: consider building on the existing work to develop www.helpandkindness.org.uk ;
- **“Our place”**: consider bringing the “Use our Loos” campaign to the town; work with the Council on a “Love Local” campaign;
- **Transport**: reviewing options with local bus company;
- **Help for organisations & Volunteers**: exploring a Blandford Volunteer Centre
- **Young People**: exploring plans for a “Youth Conversation” to ensure Children & young people’s voices are heard;
- **Homelessness and Poverty**: Work with local organisations and housing providers to create a ‘Crisis Crib Sheet’ so that everyone knows what help is available;
- **Health**: Seeking funding to provide 50 free places on Mental Health First Aid courses.

A steering group representing a range of local partners is now seeking feedback on these actions and how to deliver them.

The Event

The event had two key purposes:

1. To celebrate some of the numerous community groups and activities that operate in Blandford /the DT11 area and make it such a great place to live.

Prior to the event, local people in Blandford and the DT11 area were invited to use a nomination form to ‘Tell us about a street, community group, or community business that makes your neighbourhood special’. More than 80 nominations were received (see appendix 1), and nominated groups were invited to the event to showcase what they do, and give them a chance to meet and build connections with other nominees.

2. Ask the invited guests some simple questions about life in the area:
 - What are the challenges that Blandford + DT11 face that we can realistically address?

- What are the potential low cost/no cost solutions we can find by working together?

The success of the morning was demonstrated by first, the frequent comment that people did not realise the scale of the community activity locally, and secondly, the real buzz throughout the event as numerous new connections were being made.

VIP Feedback

Mark Woodhouse: Director Hall & Woodhouse – “Hall and Woodhouse are delighted to be an active supporter of the Making Blandford Special conversation. We’re encouraging commitment to [our] community with the Community Chest [grants] and want to lead by example and encourage others to do the same.”

Canon Jonathan Triffitt: Rector of Blandford Forum & Langton Long – ‘We need to release the resources and potential that exist within the town and surrounding areas. It is easy to think of all the things we haven’t got, but when we look around the room, what we see is an abundance of resource and potential and our job is to bring a shared vision and release the potential that sits within us’.

‘I’m also aware of the absence of the presence of children & young people and it would be a catastrophic error of judgement and a hugely missed opportunity not to include them in the discussions and plans moving forward’.

Cllr Byron Quayle – ‘We’re committed to improving local transport, ongoing engagement with the community and the possibility of developing a local ‘hub’ where people and local groups can access information and support’.

Philip Warr: High Sheriff of Dorset – ‘Blandford is a special place – if we’re to maintain the high street we may need to think about how and where we buy. We know there’s a correlation between the local economy in Blandford and levels of poverty and homelessness. One way to re-energise the local economy is through the BID.

There were a whole range of other memorable quotes from the event, including:

- Thank you very much for inviting me to the Making Blandford Special event on Saturday. There was a lot of lively discussion, energy and good ideas on the table I facilitated, and in the wider room. *Laura Everett-Coles, Public Health Dorset*
- Please can I just say that I thought this was brilliant and will be very useful in my role as Social Prescriber at the surgeries. There is so much going on in the town that we never knew about. *Sara Stringer, Whitecliff Surgery*
- Feedback about the event and the energy created sounds incredibly positive. *Sally James, Tricuro*
- Thank you very much for organising the day on Saturday. I found it very worthwhile and look forward to the next one. *Chris Williamson, Snooker Club*

We really enjoyed the day and networking with all the other groups there. *Denise Montague, Dorset Mammal Group.* Appendix 1: Summary of key Issues raised:

The main issues that were raised at the event were grouped under these headings:

Issue	No. of tables discussing this
Information	8
Transport	5
Our Place	5
Help for organisations	3
Volunteers	2
Housing & Homelessness	2
Health	2
Young People	2
Poverty	2
Environment	1
Social Isolation	1

Summary of the key discussions:

Under these headings, there were many significant issues raised, and some creative ideas for possible solutions:

Heading	Issue	Possible solutions/actions
Information	Knowing what's going on. So many groups we weren't aware of. Directories can get quickly out of date. People nervous of joining new activities. Communication.	Co-ordinated welcome pack/booklet Website: Live well Dorset/activities. Befriending & Buddy opportunities. Use Dorset Community Action. Virtual and real community noticeboards. Town team /tourist office websites. Touch screen around town, sponsored by local business. Business Improvement District B.I.D. More opportunities to work together. Community venues to advertise community activity.
Transport	Getting people into town. Risk of isolation. Cost of transport. Access to the hospital	Park & Ride for big events Buses running later and wider. Database of car sharing. UBER type App for community transport.
Our Place	On-line shopping – high street dying Identity – Market town? Apathy Village identity + Community	More events and festivals e.g. Christmas Identify what's unique about Blandford. Release young people's voices Tell the local story: goodness, richness, diversity. 'The Blandford Offer': Identity, Promote, "Buy Blandford" Best kept village/Pride, street parties

Heading	Issue	Possible solutions/actions
		Housing Assoc'n – better info' & responsibility to offer solutions/new housing Need to hear the voice of children & YP Local HUB – umbrella group to lead on solutions.
Help for organisations	Funding, resources, finding venues, costs, time/vision, finding volunteers,	Central HUB for community groups to share resources & provide support – DBS, applications, etc. 'Can anyone help with' page on central website. Knowing about potential sources of funding.
Volunteers	Central location for volunteers to find out about Community Groups/groups to find volunteers.	Database in Blandford. Open days.
Young People	Blandford Youth Centre only opens twice/week. Groups not seeing younger people. Lack of social opportunities. Lack of public transport effecting YP too. Encourage YP to engage in volunteering.	Working with schools. Building Young People (YP) involvement Need to consult YP about what they want. Could school minibuses be used to help YP get into town for organised events? Engaging with schools – facilities and students.
Health	Access to activities isn't easy for people who have a physical or cognitive disability or mental health issue. Recreational drug use/drug support	Help link people to clubs and activities. Clinicians to be up-skilled re social prescribing. Is there a gap? REACH?
Housing & Homelessness	Lack of affordable housing. No shelters & not sure where to send people who need help.	Dorset Council – more affordable housing to rent.
Poverty	Low incomes for those working. Access to benefits	Groups could offer subsidised membership with annual reviews
Environment	Litter (e.g. bad on the bypass)	Recycle points in town for glass Involving Young People Business involvement- joining litter picking groups, responsible for their stuff littering streets.
Social Isolation	Rural Isolation	Improving transport options Local facilities so travel not required.

How will this be taken forward?

A steering group comprising the event planning team and other local leaders met in early December to:

- Review the outputs from the event
- Agree priorities and resources available
- Consider quick wins and longer term action areas
- Consider if and when to bring people back together
- Agree on report outline

The steering group is working to the “999” principle:

- **Within 9 days** – send initial information out to all those that attended the event, including the presentation, a list of local charities that groups and organisations can apply to, a list of participants’ contact details and information about the Live Well Dorset Directory – Completed.
- **Within 9 weeks** – produce a simple report with some suggestions for priority actions – Completed.
- **Within 9 months** – evidence of change on the ground that will make a real difference.

They are meeting again in February to review feedback from the report, and to plan the first set of actions, including if and when to bring all representatives back together.

Proposed Action Areas

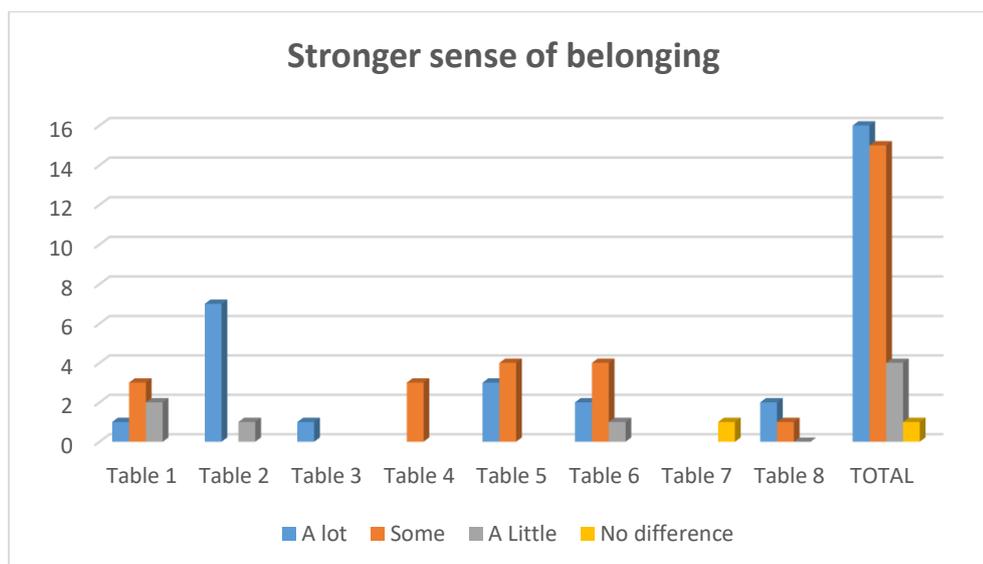
The steering group are investigating possible actions raised in the event, as follows:

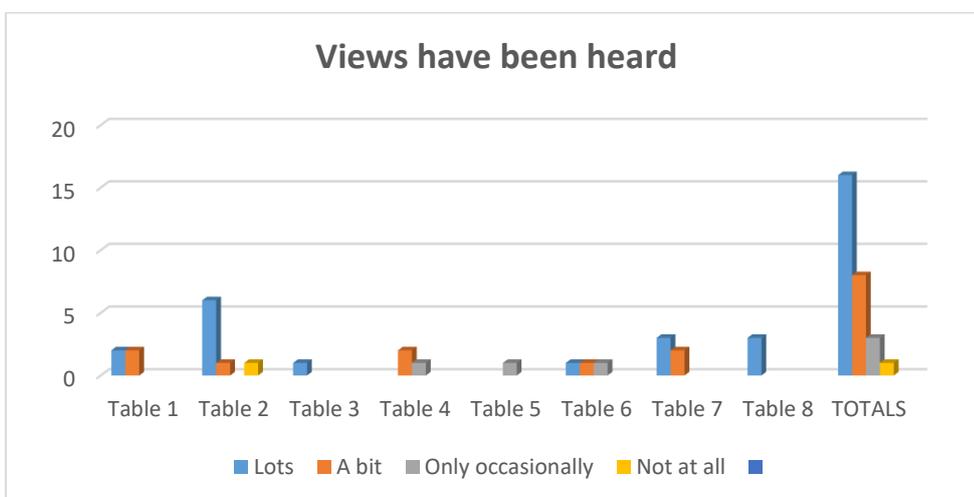
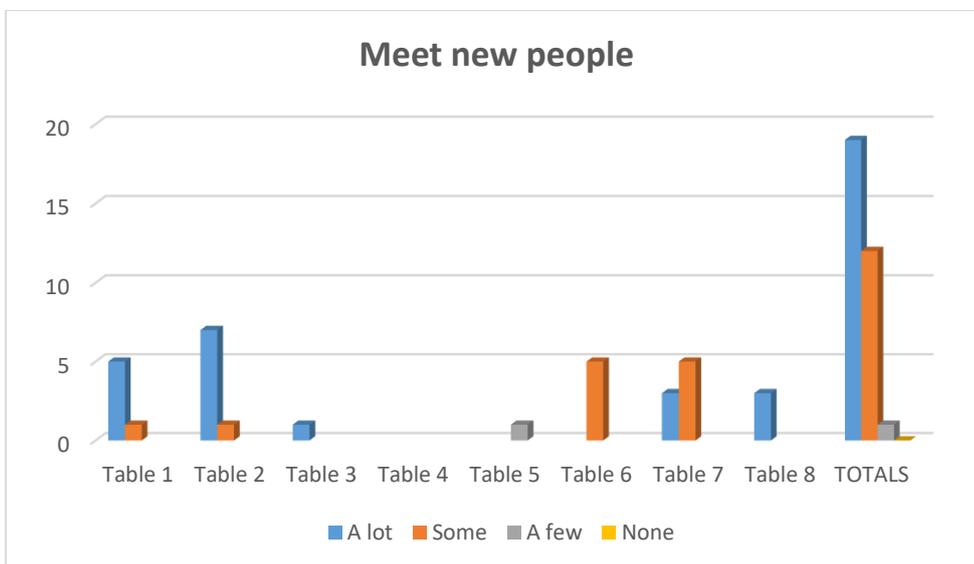
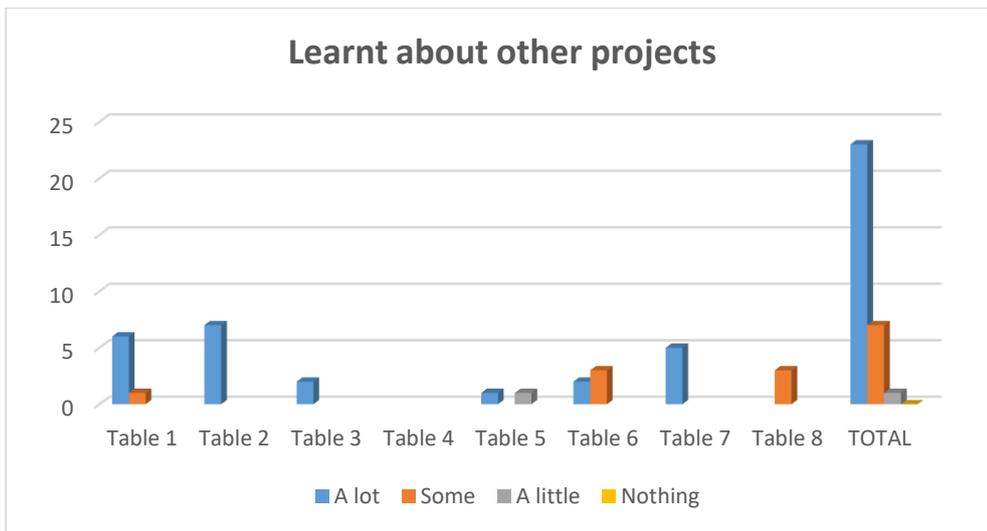
Subject	Issue Discussed	Proposed First Action
Information	Need for a central website that lists everything that’s going on.	John Sloper has set up: helpandkindness.org.uk - take a look! It’s still at stage one but has huge potential to act as a site for all that’s going on in the area and beyond. If you’d like to get involved you can be added to their early bird list by contacting them on: earlybirds@helpandkindness.co.uk
Our Place	Lack of public toilets Need for a ‘Love Local’ or ‘Buy Local’ campaign	Potential to hook up with ‘Use our Loos’ Campaign and extend the ‘Refill’ Campaign - free water bottle refills. What plans already exist with B’ford Business Club, Town Team and Town Council. What can we work on together?
Help for Organisations	Need support with finding, training and managing volunteers + DBS’s	Representatives from the steering group have met with Vicky Oliver from the Volunteer Centre in Dorchester who is keen to provide a contact point in Blandford offering support to small organisations.

Young People	Involving children and young people in planning & decision making	The steering group are looking at possible options including a 'Youth Conversation' in Blandford/DT11?
Housing & Homelessness	Need for information about what's already available locally.	Work with local organisations and housing providers to create a 'Crisis Crib Sheet'.
Health	Access to activities for people who have a mental health issue not easy.	Seek funding to provide 50 free places on Mental Health First Aid courses.
Environment	Lack of opportunities to recycle in town centre	All black bag waste in Blandford is sorted to extract recyclables
Transport	Local public transport links are limited incl. to and from hospital	Town Councillors are exploring with Damory the slim possibility of replacing the bus to Lidl with a bus to Wimborne which would require significant subsidy from Dorset Council.

Evaluation of the event

We asked people to tell us what they thought of the event:





Appendices:

1. Organisations nominated