

# SELBORNE PARISH COUNCIL

## A BRIEFING PAPER

Through the Selborne Village Community Plan public consultation exercise, the suggestion emerged that it could be in the interests of the villages of Selborne, Oakhanger and Blackmoor no longer to remain part of the same Parish. This briefing note is prepared in an attempt to explain the context, to provide some of the history of Selborne Parish and to explore the wider picture and some of the local issues that jointly affect the three villages. It also considers some of the implications of separation.

### 1. LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTEXT

Legislation requires that community governance should reflect the identities and interests of the local community of that area and that it should be effective and convenient.

Changes to Parish Council boundaries can be made where a boundary is shown to be anomalous or redundant or if there has been a major change in the local population. Consideration has to be given to the size, population and boundaries of the proposed new area and to the impact on community cohesion. Community cohesion is linked specifically to the interests of local communities. Consideration of the merits of the case for change will include whether or not the proposed new area would improve community cohesion, and whether or not the proposed altered boundary would improve community empowerment at the local level.

The decision maker in changes to Parish Council boundaries is the relevant District Council. Requests for parish separation can be initiated either by the Parish Council or by the local community. If a Parish Council requests the District Council to instigate a Governance Review, i.e. a boundary review, the District Council will investigate whether or not this is a viable option and it will then issue a Report; there is no guarantee that a Governance Review will be undertaken. Alternatively, the local community can petition the District Council; if the petition has sufficient signatures, this will automatically initiate a Governance Review. The process involves a wide public consultation exercise. People should be aware that the result is always decided by the District Council, it is for that Authority to decide which villages should be grouped together and the outcome may not be in accordance with the wishes of the majority of residents. Each parish has to be viable as an administrative unit of local government. Nowadays, where changes are made, the trend is to create larger Parish Councils in order that they should be more effective.

Nationally, most parishes are below 12,000 people. The village of Selborne has 540 people on the electoral register; Blackmoor has 255 people on the register, and Oakhanger has an electorate of 219. Therefore, with only just over 1,000 electors in the parish, Selborne Parish Council is not one of the larger parishes in the country.

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### 2. PRIMARY HISTORIC SOURCES

Selborne, Oakhanger and Blackmoor share both joint historic interests and historic joint interests. The historical context is the essence of the issue at stake.

Domesday Book records Selborne, Norton, Rhode and Oakhanger as in the same parish. Manorial Documents record “Manors of Selborne, Selborne Makerel (Gurdon), Temple Southerington (Southerington), Norton, Blackmoor (part of Woolmer Forest), Oakhanger. NB A temple existed at Blackmoor in 1254 and there are settlement earthworks at Norton.”

It documents Selborne: 903 (C16) seleborne; 1086 Selesburna; 1201 Seleburne. Selborne is clearly named after what is now called *Oakhanger Stream*; disregarding the form in Domesday Book it appears to have been seala burna ‘stream of sallows’ (Coates, 1989: 145). The Sel-bourne was probably the name given to the streamlet that rises on Selborne Common (west of the church) and which passes just to the north of the agglomeration.

Oakhanger has been a settlement since the Iron Age. It is famous for its historic finds including Mesolithic implements and the massive Roman hoard of over 11,000 silver pieces now held in the British Museum.

Blackmoor and Oakhanger were until relatively recent times all in one ecclesiastical parish, which accounts for the boundaries of the present civil parish. Both Oakhanger and Blackmoor had chapels but the mother church of the parish was, until Victorian times, St Mary’s Selborne. These historical links are important to understand the way these three communities have developed and should be respected.

Blackmoor is a model Victorian Estate village built in the 1860s by the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Selborne, then Lord Chancellor. In 1918, his son, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Selborne conveyed a piece of land in Selborne to Selborne Parish Council for the purpose of a recreation ground. In 1925, his son, Lord Wolmer, gave a new area of land for a recreation ground, replacing the 1918 recreation ground. During the 1950s, the Blackmoor Aided Primary School was rebuilt on land donated by Blackmoor Estate, at Blackmoor Estate’s expense with a grant from the then Department of Education. The school served both Blackmoor and Oakhanger as well as part of Whitehill. When the new school opened, the previous school reverted to the ownership of Blackmoor Estate which then donated the building to the community for use as a Village Hall. In the early 1980s, Blackmoor Estate donated the land at Ketchers’ Field in Selborne, that had previously accommodated their hop-picking machine, for an affordable housing scheme in return for acquiring nomination rights on some of the housing units.

Selborne Parish Council was created in 1894. It was part of Alton Rural District from 1894 - 1974 until it became part of East Hampshire District from 1974 - date. The boundary of the civil Council was altered 1929 when Whitehill civil parish was formed. Since that time, Selborne Parish Council’s boundary has continued to include Selborne, Oakhanger (including part of Shortheath

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Common) and Blackmoor, including Bradshott Lane and also Plantation Way which is adjacent to Whitehill.

### 3. ISSUES THAT LINK THE VILLAGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

#### i) Rights of Way network

Rights of Way are the responsibility of Hampshire County Council (HCC). There is an easily accessible Rights of Way network between and around the three villages of the parish. The 75 Rights of Way (Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways Open to All Traffic or 'BOATs') are variously numbered 'Selborne 1' to 'Selborne 701'. These Rights of Way hold HCC Definitive Statements. See pages 3-12 at: <http://www.hants.gov.uk/rh/row/s.pdf>

In 2007, Selborne Parish Council produced a leaflet to help heighten people's awareness of the countryside available across the parish. The information in it is of benefit to the local community and also to the many tourists who visit the area. <http://www.hants.gov.uk/rh/walking/selborne.pdf>

The circular walk in the leaflet, called 'The Monks' Walk', was supplied by Selborne Parish Council. It takes walkers from the car park at the rear of the Selborne Arms Public House, along The Street (B3006) as far as the Queens Hotel, down the narrow Huckers Lane, (now a bridleway and once a metalled way to the Priory built by monks in the 14th century and then known as 'Via Canonorum' or Monk's Way). The route descends to the wood and continues across fields to reach the access road to Priory Farm (1.25 miles). It then follows Oakhanger Stream to Oakhanger, past the Red Lion Public House and on to Mary Magdalene Church (2.5 miles). For a five mile loop, the route turns left (west), past Binswood Farm, across a stile and through trees to reach the Hangers' Way. This follows a track through fields and Long Lythe National Trust woodland before finally climbing up through the churchyard and across Selborne's ancient Plestor, past the Queens', and back to the Selborne Arms where the walk began.

The Via Canonorum says much about Medieval Selborne. The route followed the south side of the Oakhanger Stream north-eastwards for c. 1.5km to the Priory, and this was a route centre in its own right. From the Priory, the pilgrim route continued north east to Chapel Farm at Oakhanger (c. 1.5 km), south to the Knights Templar holding at Southerington (c. 1km), and north-west to Hartley Mauditt (c. 2.5km) and Alton. All of these routes exist as footpaths. The Priors were the Lords of the Manor of Selborne, conducting the services in the parish church and officiating at the Court Leet. It is virtually certain that they controlled markets at The Plestor and access to the pilgrim routes through Selborne. In this scenario, the position of the parish church at The Plestor and within metres of the Via Canonorum would have placed it on the major through route, rather than away from it as it is today in relation to the Selborne Road.

In his writings, Gilbert White also discusses the links between Selborne and the Blackmoor area heathland via Honey Lane.

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### ii) Planning Issues and Minerals & Waste

Amongst a number of businesses in the parish, there are two sizeable local commercial businesses that affect all of the three villages of Selborne, Oakhanger and Blackmoor. These are Selborne Brickworks and Blackmoor Estate.

Selborne Brickworks is located in Honey Lane, approximately 1.5km north west of Blackmoor, 2km east of Selborne and 1km south of Oakhanger. It is associated also with Chapel Farm at Oakhanger.

The Brickworks' Area extends to 11.6 hectares. The existing land use is agriculture. Bricks have been made on the site since Roman times. The Selborne Range of traditional, handmade bricks have been made since 1872. The locally quarried clay is gault clay, some 60 million years old. The site is allocated in Policy 22 (Brick-making clay) of the Hampshire Minerals & Waste Plan. Clay extraction to support brick making at Selborne Brickworks was originally permitted with planning conditions that the land be reinstated with inert fill material and restored to agriculture afterwards.

A succession of companies, in the directorship of one local family, has run the Brickworks in recent decades, apart from a relatively short period, from 1995-1998, when the Brickworks was run by Michelmersh. However, the Brickworks is not currently operational. The most recent company to own it is now in receivership. The planning permission for the extraction of clay lapsed in 2010. It is not known if brick-making is to begin again.

In 2012, permission was granted for the construction of an anaerobic digester on the site to enable the production of sufficient biomethane to supply all the energy that the Brickworks might require for its operations. The methane gas is to go direct to the National Grid from which the Brickworks would draw the energy it requires, obviating any need to store gas on site. The permission includes lagoons, a feedstock handling building and a gas-conditioning unit on the existing brickworks site and on the adjacent land. All vehicle movements associated with the operation of the AD plant are required to use an access haul road across Chapel Farm from Oakhanger Lane.

Over the years, there have been many traffic issues, 19 EHDC planning applications, 14 planning appeals and 7 planning enforcements associated with the Brickworks / Chapel Farm. There have also been 45 Minerals & Waste planning applications submitted to Hampshire County Council. This level of activity is inevitably relevant to the interests all three villages. On behalf of the residents of all three villages, the Parish Council has regularly participated in a liaison panel with Hampshire County Council to try and address problems that arise from time to time.

Blackmoor Estate Ltd straddles land around Blackmoor, Selborne and Oakhanger. Its area is approximately 1,000 hectares. The Estate is one of only three remaining commercial apple growers in Hampshire. Blackmoor Orchards grow apples, pears and cherries for many of the supermarkets on 250

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acres of orchards, whilst Blackmoor Nurseries now supplies increasing numbers of plants directly to people who want to grow fruit from a specialist nursery in their own gardens. The Estate is the UK's leading grower of fruit trees and soft fruit.

With regard to Minerals & Waste, Blackmoor Estate has interests in a soil recycling plant and green waste composting site, with associated development, run by Williams of Bordon on its land near the A325. On behalf of all three villages, the Parish Council has regularly responded to consultations and/or applications for planning permissions in connection with these operations.

To date, there have been 7 EHDC planning applications, 2 planning appeals and 1 planning enforcement associated with Blackmoor Estate. There have also been 4 Minerals & Waste planning applications submitted to Hampshire County Council.

The Estate owns sites in Blackmoor and in Selborne that fall within the SHLAA. There will be planning applications for housing development on these sites in the future. The Estate will be looking at the delivery of affordable housing 'in the round' in the whole parish, taking into consideration all SHLAA sites. The Parish Council will be consulted on such proposals and will wish to respond as a full consultee on behalf of both villages; neither Selborne nor Blackmoor would wish to be treated as a 'neighbouring parish' with less influence on the decision made by the planning authority.

#### **4. THE FUTURE AND IMPLICATIONS OF BOUNDARY CHANGE**

Ultimately, a change in parish boundary must bring about improved community engagement and better local democracy, and result in more effective and convenient delivery of services.

With an electorate of only 540 people, it is unlikely that the village of Selborne would be considered eligible to become a discrete 'Selborne only' Parish Council because of the difficulties in demonstrating viability. Should a request from the local community for a boundary review be successful, however, it should be noted that the new Parish Council would still be responsible for maintaining those services that are currently provided by the present Parish Council e.g. the allotments, the recreation ground, the Plestor, the Lion's Mouth and so on. It should be noted that, if split from Oakhanger and Blackmoor, Selborne Parish Council's funds would diminish by nearly half because the precept is based upon the size of the electorate. The number of Selborne councillors would also reduce by half. There would then be six councillors instead of twelve to take on the Parish Council's work and half the amount of money to do almost the same amount of work.

If the District Council were to incorporate Selborne, Oakhanger and Blackmoor into new village groups and revised parish boundaries, councillors from Selborne, Oakhanger and Blackmoor would need to continue to meet on a regular basis for the purpose of working together on the issues that would still jointly affect their villages and shared environs. For example, historically, the villages have been

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able to share and pool expert knowledge and take an integrated approach towards responding to the planning applications that jointly affect them. In order to continue to do this effectively, parish councillors would therefore need to attend each other's meetings at

each of the new Parish Councils. This will increase the number of meetings that councillors will need to attend in order that they should be well-informed and effective.

In the event that there should be a request to hive Oakhanger off from Selborne Parish, a likely revision might be that the District Council would absorb Oakhanger into the parish of Kingsley; the two villages have a shared interest in Shortheath Common and in traffic issues resulting from the Whitehill-Bordon development. However, the kinship between these two villages pretty much ends there. They do not share a history that goes back to the Domesday Book. There are not many significant planning applications in Oakhanger that have an impact on Kingsley and vice versa. It is unlikely there would be an impact upon Kingsley as a result of any future planning applications that might be forthcoming at Selborne Brickworks and Chapel Farm, although there could be upon Oakhanger. With regard to planning applications at Selborne Brickworks, a new Oakhanger + Kingsley Parish Council would be consulted simply as a neighbouring parish and so their opinion would count less than the opinion of Selborne Parish Council in whose governance area the Brickworks would still lie. Similarly, applications at Chapel Farm would be sent to Kingsley Parish Council for consultation, and Selborne Parish Council would simply be treated as a neighbouring parish with reduced influence. Traditionally, planning applications at both these sites affect Blackmoor at least as much as Oakhanger. Yet, if Blackmoor had been hived off from Selborne, and possibly amalgamated with Greatham or even with Whitehill-Bordon with which it has little in common, then the village of Blackmoor, which would arguably be the most affected by the proposals, would just be treated as part of a neighbouring parish only. The views of its residents would be regarded as less important than the views of the people in the parish of Kingsley who would not in fact be affected at all.

The District Council could alternatively decide that Oakhanger should be amalgamated with Whitehill-Bordon. The two settlements are unlikely bedfellows, however, having little character in common and not many issues in common other than traffic issues.

In the interests of viability, it could be that the District Council would decide to amalgamate Selborne either with Newton Valence or with Colemore and Priors Dean Parish Council. Either is a possibility, but these villages grouped together would share few historical links or joint interests, apart from that Newton Valence and Selborne both have an interest in Selborne Common and the Hanger.

Future severance of the parish would also require that the Rights of Way network be reassessed and a large number of Rights of Way revised, renumbered and attributed to other parishes. Selborne could also lose "The Monks' Walk" as this would be trespassing on the territory of another parish.

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### 5. IN CONCLUSION

If a change to the boundary of Selborne parish is to be proposed, the questions and issues to be considered and addressed will include:

- a. How would the separation of Selborne, Blackmoor and Oakhanger ensure that community governance arrangements continue to reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government?
- b. How would a smaller parish boundary assist and promote the standing and effectiveness of Selborne Parish Council on the wider local government stage?
- c. With a range of historic joint interests, present day circumstances and challenges that link the three villages, how will a split parish further the interests and collective well-being of the local communities in each village?
- d. As the local community and population has not expanded, is the proposed change justified?
- e. If the three villages fracture as a single parish unit, how will each village be best placed to respond to and deal with the issues that jointly affect them?
- f. If the Parish Council is split, whilst each village would be free to suggest proposals for alternative arrangements to the District Council it will be for the District Council to determine what the new arrangements should be. It will not be in the gift of either Selborne, Blackmoor or Oakhanger to decide the outcome of the revision and their future parish boundaries.

Parish Councils are the first level of local government. Parish Councillors have no political association unlike District and County Councils. They are usually elected but may also be co-opted from time to time. The number of councillors depends on the size /population of the parish.

Parish Councils have very limited powers. The main executive powers are the provision of allotments, administering itself in accordance with national standards and the acquisition and distribution of certain grants. The Council's principal and best known advisory role is considering and commenting on planning applications within the Parish boundary. Parish Councils often lobby on issues such as traffic, crime prevention, lack of services etc. but they have no significant executive powers in such matters.

Accordingly, any change in the boundaries of Selborne Parish which results in a smaller parish will reduce the revenue (precept) and reduce our ability to influence. The Localism Act offers the Parish Council opportunity in future to achieve more for the Parish but this will be affected by parish size and level of precept.

For these reasons, the Council is presently not in favour of considering change unless substantial reasons to the contrary are presented.