Background Information

Appendix 1

#### **Geography & Geology**

The three parishes of Shaftesbury, Melbury Abbas and Cann sit in the north-east part of North Dorset, largely in a designated area of outstanding natural beauty, some managed by the National Trust. The combined parishes have an area of 5,300 acres (2,145 ha.) and border Wiltshire.

Shaftesbury sits prominently on a natural and unusual green sandstone escarpment some 800ft (240m) above sea level at its highest point, making it the highest town in Dorset and the second highest in England. There are views over four counties (Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset and Hampshire). The green sandstone is a significant characteristic of older buildings in the town and surrounding area, many of them listed. The area around contains dispersed and isolated hamlets and farmsteads, with settlements, generally low lying, at the foothills of steep chalk escarpments. In the eastern portion of the plan area, a deep re-entrant valley exposes the Gault Clay below the Greensand; in the west the land undulates on Kimmeridge Clay at altitudes of 200ft (60m) to 400ft (120m).

Most of the Plan area, including the town of Shaftesbury, is sited between the rolling vales of the Blackmore Vale to the west and the Vale of Wardour in Wiltshire to the east. The south-western part of Melbury Abbas is the most environmentally constrained area, lying wholly within the Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase AONBs (an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The countryside around Shaftesbury is still largely traditional and tranquil farmland, a peaceful landscape of undulating rolling hills with an irregular pattern of fields, copses, small streams and brooks, dense hedgerows and copses1. Among significant physical features in and just outside the Plan area (apart from the Shaftesbury escarpment itself) are the chalk hills of Melbury Beacon (263m), Win Green (277m), and wooded Duncliffe Hill (210m) with its distinctive wave shaped profile.

#### **Transport – Roads and Rail**

Shaftesbury is at the junction of a network of roads and in the past was a major staging post for routes north-south and east-west. Today the A350 is the main north-south route through the area, connecting the cities of Bath and Bristol across the A303 to the south coast. The east-west A30, the former Great West Road, crosses and coincides with the A350 at Shaftesbury for most of its length through the town, attracting large volumes of traffic. The parallel section of the C13 between Shaftesbury and Blandford through Melbury Abbas is used as an alternative route by many drivers including HGVs, despite it being unsuited for such traffic, especially at Dinah’s Hollow, an ancient trackway.

The West of England main line, from London Waterloo to Exeter, lies to the north just outside the Neighbourhood Plan area, with the closest railway station being at Gillingham (5 miles). The former Shaftesbury station at Semley was closed in the 1960s.

Appendix 2

History and Heritage

The Neighbourhood Plan area is largely 18th-19th century in appearance with vestiges of earlier origins also visible. The area is centred on the historic market town of Shaftesbury, with its commanding views to a traditional working countryside; beneath are the historic settlements of Enmore Green and St. James, the rural village of Melbury Abbas, and more dispersed rural villages and farms along lanes typically seen at Cann. The setting is key to the character of the area.

Shaftesbury is best known as a Saxon foundation, although there is some limited evidence for prehistoric and Roman activity in Shaftesbury and Cann. Isolated finds and discoveries from the Mesolithic period onwards indicate that the area was settled during this time, but the extent and character of this settlement is not clear. The topographic location of Shaftesbury would have made for an ideal fortified site, but there is no hard evidence for this; it seems that other locations in the wider area, such as Castle Rings, Wincombe and Hambledon Hill were favored. Documentary sources have been interpreted by some historians to indicate that a minster church had been established at Shaftesbury by the 7th century, although others see the area as unimportant until the arrival of King Alfred.

Recognizing the strategic value of the hilltop location, King Alfred is believed to have founded Shaftesbury as a burh in about 880 and, a few years later, a nunnery, the first of its kind in England. Bimport was likely the main thoroughfare, but this changed as the Abbey prospered and the town spread to the east and south. The late Saxon and medieval street and plot patterns that developed are largely intact today and form the historic core of our town.

In the countryside beyond, the Abbess’ holdings increased over time, adding to the Abbey’s wealth[[1]](#footnote-1) and connecting the country to the town. Barton Farm, the Abbey’s home farm, stretched to Cann, and Melbury Abbas was also a valuable asset. Recorded in Domesday, “Meleberie” provided ploughlands, pasture, woodland, and four mills.[[2]](#footnote-2) Agriculture and milling have continued here over centuries. Today this area retains some pre-19th century irregular-shaped, small fields often associated with ancient woodland and trackways like Dinah’s Hollow; these are the surviving elements of medieval and post-medieval landscapes. More common are the larger, formally planned 18th and 19th century fields, which are contemporary with the majority of the farmhouses and outbuildings in the area and indicate continued, informal enclosure of open land. The majority of the fields today are of 20th century date and represent a mixture of new fields and the modification and amalgamation of earlier enclosures.

Shaftesbury and its suburbs, along with Cann and Melbury Abbas, are essentially Georgian and Victorian in character, the result of alterations to 16th and 17th century buildings as well as new construction. While some early structures have survived, such as the medieval Abbey’s precinct wall and the 16th century Edwardstowe on Bimport, [and sections of the 17th century East Melbury Farmhouse, White Pit Lane] the majority have made way for newer public buildings, houses, shops, schools, churches, and inns.

*A History of Melbury Abbas,* first published in 1985 by the Women’s Institute, provides background information and considerable details of the village’s landscape, buildings, and social history [link]. An in-depth study of the history and character of Shaftesbury town, St. James, Barton Hill, Layton Lane, Cann, Enmore Green, and Christy’s Lane, can be found in the *Dorset Historic Towns Project*, 2011 (dorsetforyou.gov.uk). This provides a detailed account of development in the area from prehistoric to modern times. Examples of this development through time can best be seen on our much-photographed, world famous Gold Hill.

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| Gold Hill: Development Through Time  Now a picturesque collection of cottages along a steep, cobbled street with a splendid view of rural Dorset, Gold Hill was a busy place of commerce for centuries. An open marketplace had developed at the top of the hill as the Abbey flourished and the town began to prosper. This was overlooked by a guildhall (since demolished) and St. Peter’s Church, our only medieval church to have survived (with alterations) of 12 total.  The massive buttressed wall that borders Gold Hill was constructed to retain the Abbess’ new park to the west, laid out during the 14th century, when Shaftesbury was the wealthiest and most populous town in Dorset; in the early 19th century, the lower section of the wall was repaired and rebuilt.  Opposite, many of the cottages that line Gold Hill date from the 17th century[[3]](#footnote-3); several were inns, serving traders as well as travellers on the Great West Road when the town was an important staging post. The buildings have been altered, refaced, or rebuilt in the 18th and 19th centuries. The oldest house on Gold Hill is probably Sun and Moon cottage, just below and adjoining St. Peter’s Church. This building has 16th century origins and served as a clergy house and, during the 18th and 19th centuries, an inn or public house.  At the top of the hill, the Town Hall dates from 1826 (with later alterations), built by Earl Grosvenor to replace the Tudor guildhall. The Grosvenors owned most of Shaftesbury from 1820-1918; during that time, they initiated improvements in the town and built new public buildings and model housing.  Today Gold Hill is still recognized by visitors as the setting for Ridley Scott’s Hovis bread advert in 1973, a testament to its extraordinary character. This view of our town features in posters for English tourism the world over. |

The spectacular views from Gold Hill, Park Walk and Castle Hill, along with more intimate views through side streets and alleyways, are major elements in the distinctiveness of the town; this “natural picturesqueness and singularity” was lauded by Thomas Hardy in his evocative description of Shaston in *Jude the Obscure*. For some 600 years, Shaftesbury Abbey dominated the skyline; today, the 19th-20th century Holy Trinity Church,[[4]](#footnote-4) built near the Abbey ruins, conveys that sense of place, its 100 ft. tower a landmark in the countryside.

For centuries our buildings, walls and monuments have been constructed of green sandstone in rubble or ashlar form and, in some cases, brick. Roofs are typically thatch, slate or clay tile. The harmonious use of these local materials is important both in retaining the historic character of the area and in emphasizing the linkage with the surrounding landscape from which the materials were sourced. (In the case of Shaftesbury, the dissolved Abbey served as a quarry of sorts in the 16th century, with portions of the dismantled structure reused to build or adorn houses around the town.) The continued use of local materials together with traditional design adds to the character of the area, as does the existence of many unbroken groups of historic buildings with minimal modern intrusion in places such as Gold Hill, St. James, parts of the Town centre and Melbury Abbas.

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| Shaftesbury's Tunnels  Much/of Shaftesbury's past lies hidden beneath our houses, gardens, shops, and streets. Cellars, icehouses, wells and cisterns (also called dead wells) served useful functions in earlier times. Some have since been removed or infilled.  Additional underground features remain unexplained. Sometimes referred to as secret tunnels, they are stone-lined structures of unknown date and use[[5]](#footnote-5). These are unequivocally historic assets characteristic of Shaftesbury and should be given proper consideration. The need to investigate or preserve these features should be taken into account when planning applications are submitted and reviewed |

Melbury is a Saxon word*, Mel* meaning mill, *Burg or bury* meaning village or parish; bury often meant the settlement was fortified, probably with a wooden fence or bank; Abbas meaning in the care of the Abbey of Shaftesbury. The evidence of Bronze Age round barrows and tumuli are seen in the tops of downs in the Parish, and in 1846, Romano-British burials were found near Melbury Hill. In the Domesday Survey of 1086 Meleberie was described as a moderately large place, with a recorded population of 47. Cann or

*Canna* (in the 18th century known as Shaston-St. Rumbold) is first mentioned in documents early in the 12th century, but almost certainly is older. In the south Melbury Hill rises to a height of 850 ft. This is the site of Melbury Beacon, one of a series of fire beacons in use at the time of the Armada.

**Appendix 3**

**General Practice Provision**

The practice is currently more resilient and prepared for the future than ever before. Following many changes and difficulties with recruitment a range of options were reviewed in 2015 and the conclusion reached that the Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton practices were closely matched and a merger took place to take both practices forward. The Blackmore Vale Partnership (BVP) came into being.

Increased size enabled more flexibility, staff can be moved around to fill gaps and recruitment became easier. Patients also have a range of options including visiting any of four surgeries at Shaftesbury, Sturminster Newton, Fontmell Magna and Marnhull. The BVP now has a full complement of GPs but is also looking to recruit more. The current national recruitment situation for GPs is very difficult, fewer young doctors wish to train as GPs, many older GPs are retiring much earlier often at 55 now instead of 65 in the past. There is a crisis looming in Dorset as a large cohort of GPs approach retirement over the next few years. Many younger doctors do not want to be partners in a practice because of the workload and financial obligations and so the BVP is looking at a range of employment options. They are offering more support and training, more flexible terms and working times and a mixture of primary care and secondary care options for the doctors. In addition, a range of other health professionals are being introduced into general practice. These include nurse practitioners, a pharmacist, paramedics to carry out home visits and more highly trained admin staff to support the doctors.

The practice is aware that many patients miss the continuity of care that was delivered in former times when they were able to build a relationship with ‘their own’ GP. Unfortunately, today with so many part time doctors this is no longer always possible. Use of the GP service more appropriately might free up more time for those with more demanding needs. The practice estimates that about 40% of people visiting the surgery do not need a GP to deal with their problems. Patient education about the appropriate use of local resources is a high priority for the practice and providing a range of skills to cater for patients will help with meeting demand.

The Blackmore Vale Partnership is coping with the increasing population. The current buildings have capacity and with small changes will be able to cope with more. The practice estimates that it can cope with an increase of up to 5,000 more patients in its present form. The current practice list size is \*\*\*\*\*.

Planning for the future is taking place with the further recruitment of two more GPs to improve the work/life balance of all staff.

The patient profile of the practice has changed over recent years and there is more demand from different demographics \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* table of age-related demand in Shaftesbury area.

The practice has an open list which means that everyone who applies to join the practice must be accepted. About 5% of the practice list take up the most resources and these are mostly in the older age group. Those patients from ‘difficult’ backgrounds are much less of a problem. The average list size of a GP is 1800-2000 patients with partners having more, up to 2,500. These figures are equal to those throughout the country.

The BVP, because of its increased capacity, is able to offer joint working arrangements to use their facilities more efficiently across the whole of the practice area. Triage is becoming established practice with ever patient asking for a same day appointment being spoken to by a GP before deciding the most appropriate action. The practice carries out 4,000 home visits every year and these can now be assessed by a paramedic saving GP time and getting the most appropriate treatment for the patient.

The practice is looking for a partnership in care, a two-way process with the patients considering clinical needs alongside people’s needs to deliver the best, targeted service. Use of different types of healthcare staff will help to meet complex health needs for example Health Care assistants visiting the elderly and dealing with both medical and social needs. It could be that drop-centres could be useful in providing different ways to deliver non-urgent and straightforward services.

**ANNUAL PATIENT ACTIVITY - SHAFTESBURY**

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| Current List Size | Abbey View & Fontmell 15,262  Sturminster & Marnhull 8,831  TOTAL for BVP 24,093 |
| Face to face appointments | 196,370 |
| Prescriptions issued | 260,975 |
| Telephone consultations | 170,000 |
| Home Visits | 2,500 |
| Patient contacts | 627,345 |

Parking at Abbey View and Sturminster Newton is an enormous problem and creates a lot of ill feeling but the NHS is not obliged to provide parking other than that for disabled people. The abuse suffered by practice staff from people parking inappropriately is very shocking and unacceptable. There is a problem with people who are not visiting the surgeries using parking spaces without consideration for patients. A patient participation group is being set up for the Shaftesbury area to try to help with this type of problem.

**The over-riding message from the practice is that they can cope with increasing demand although GP recruitment is a real challenge and a national issue. The practice is in the best position it has been in for the last 10 years. There is no crisis.**

However, it would be helpful if the planning authority discussed larger scale developments with the practice prior to granting planning permission to allow for the practice to make adjustments in advance.

From the practice point of view the loss of beds at Westminster Memorial Hospital would present an immediate problem with palliative care beds and the current bed spaces should be better used as a step-up facility and not as presently step-down. If the hospital were to close completely the diagnostic facilities would be greatly missed as would the Minor Injuries Unit. Ways of using these facilities better in conjunction with local surgeries will be explored.

1. 1 The Abbey became one of the wealthiest and most powerful in the country. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Domesday Book mentions Shaftesbury and Melbury, with both recording higher than average populations and tax revenue. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3 Many replace even earlier buildings on the hill. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Holy Trinity Church, now decommissioned, was built on the site of its medieval predecessor. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5 Subterranean passages of varying age survive in other British towns.  The functions of some have been lost over time; others were used for defense, food storage, water supply, or club meetings. In Devon, vaulted passages dating as early as the 14th century carried piped water into the center of the walled city of Exeter. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)