

Trull Parish Council Survey

Overview

The Parish Council is aware that the creation of a “sizeable hub” at Canonsgrove is a contentious and potentially divisive issue within our villages.

In pre-COVID times discussion would have been easier. There could have been “events” such as those held when the Neighbourhood Plan was evolving. These would have provided an opportunity for residents to question, seek clarification and make suggestions. In addition, the Parish Council would have been able to assess public opinion. Alas, this was not to be and, based on Covid-secure guidance, a village survey was felt to be the next best option.

The content of the survey was limited in scope because SWT have not consulted with the Parish Council in any meaningful way - for example we do not know anything about the “sizeable hub”.

The survey presented options of smaller, dispersed multi-occupancy and Housing First accommodation because they are being increasingly used as a preferred option to larger provision. They were presented in order of size. The Housing First Model had an explanatory note because it was felt that many would know nothing about it.

If the survey were presented again the “tick one box” option would be best removed. Many respondents recognised the need for a “layered” approach, for the greater part multi-occupancy and Housing First. The box provided for people to write down their best solution/stories was well-used. It demonstrated that real thought had been put into many responses. Some also told of personal experiences. These experiences have not been recorded here but all responses/comments can be found in the 30 page appendix.

There were a couple of residents who felt that the letter was biased against Canonsgrove; on the other hand there was one who questioned why there was no opportunity to say “no” to Canonsgrove whilst another questioned how the PC could assert that “most residents” supported the use of Canonsgrove as a temporary emergency measure. It must be accepted that individuals come at this from different angles and it is essential that we respect each others’ opinions, just as we need to consider the needs of the homeless and local residents. Fear and anxiety about Canonsgrove do seem to affect a significant number of people, young and old alike. It would not be fair to put that down to “nimbyism” or being uncaring about the homeless. One older respondent who reported feeling intimidated in her own home wrote that whilst the homeless “need help and have rights, so do we.”

Impact of poor communication by SWT

Before looking at comments regarding the choices it is worth mentioning some of the comments made regarding the lack of transparency and consultation from SWT:

“I feel sure that we would all be better able to give an informed opinion if we were able to be involved in the process of the Options Appraisal which, in spite of multiple requests to SWT, has been denied us. Largely as a consequence, I am afraid that I have no confidence in SWT to conduct the Appraisal in an unbiased and open manner, indeed it

would appear that SWT is already predisposed towards the long term use of Canonsgrove.”

“Unacceptable the local residents are not to be consulted by SWT until decision has been made. A plan must be agreed to achieve this objective in a challenging timescale with all agencies and local residents working together on a compelling project which fulfils the long-term needs of all stakeholders.”

“The proposed “consultation” by SW&T is neither Liberal or Democratic and is obviously designed to limit discussion to the impact of the decision only. “One way of avoiding needless scrutiny I suppose” but it is sure to rebound on them.”

Survey responses: Summary and Analysis

Below is a brief overview of issues raised and comments relating to sizeable hubs:

Sizeable Hub at Canonsgrove: Less than 1% support a sizeable hub larger than the numbers already resident at Canonsgrove. A few suggested the use of Canonsgrove for small multi-occupancy use or in tandem with Housing First. One suggested using Canonsgrove for self-contained units for 50 people based on their ability and willingness to live alongside a quiet rural community, to promote cohesion between all residents.

Centrally located sizeable hub: 26.5% support.

Initial support lost through personal experience/observed behaviour

Fear/anxiety for residents across age ranges. A large number of vulnerable older people.

Anxiety using bus/shop/ feeling unsafe in home.

Anti-social behaviour/criminal activity/litter

Those with complex needs/history of violent behaviour should not be there.

More people more problems

Lack of services/distance/bus

Health issues walking into town/ danger on roads/.

Causes late night disturbance

Lack of things to do

Homeless are people. Human scale is what is essential

Social isolation due to large numbers

Has anyone asked clients what they want? Are they given choice?

- Segregates and stigmatises residents
- Exports anti-social behaviour to one small area of town.
- Not necessarily the cheapest option

Larger accommodation is not COVID safe.

Long term funding/quality of staff?

“We are not experts in the best solutions to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. However, common sense (to me) would suggest there should be a range of options, not a single option. If it is to be a permanent solution then our limited research on the internet suggest that a sizeable hub is not the best option. Even if it is temporary. We are intrinsically opposed to sizeable hubs. Smaller supported housing is the way forward.”

“It should be clear to all, that to abandon less fortunate members of society at Canonsgrove, 1.5 miles from the nearest shop and 3 miles from our town centre in this day and age is unacceptable. Those in need of shelter also need support, a place to call home, meaningful work and a community with numerous activities, within a bustling community.”

“Whilst these suggested alternatives might be ideal solutions: given the state of the county and indeed the country’s finances I think where they are at the moment they at least have a roof over their heads.”

“I am in favour of the support that Canonsgrove has provided to the homeless however I do not feel this should be extended to support any extra people. SWT should be consulting the Parish Council on any decision they make regarding the future of the site.”

“Small site accommodation enables better interaction within local community. Wouldn’t want a larger site at Canonsgrove.”

“the active support of Canonsgrove by many of the Trull community has been heart warming. Whilst supporting the need to rehouse the homeless, and provide the special care that some of them need, would it not make more sense to set up a number of smaller facilities spread throughout Somerset West and Taunton rather than locate them only at one site. Canonsgrove could be one of those for smaller numbers who would benefit from not having easy access to Taunton services.”

Smaller, dispersed accommodation: 32.4% support was the most popular choice.

“Avoid using large-scale accommodation, which although no doubt considerably less expensive than multi-occupancy units are a false economy, can be very impersonal and residents easily become institutionalised. Outcomes are better for clients accommodated in smaller units - ref. ARC website which states that due to the use of Canonsgrove, Lindley House is only approx. 50%full (ie about 30 residents) which has resulted in a “calmer environment, fewer distractions, and a highly positive outlook from clients.”

“The wider distribution of the individuals into much smaller local housing solutions normalises their accommodation situation. I work in a charity that deals(in part) with housing issues for those with moderate to complex needs. It is widely recognised that the optimal solution for such individuals suffering from homelessness is to keep them as close to a normal situation as possible. It is also recognised that concentrating such individuals in large groups, especially “out of town” tends to exacerbate the common risks both to the individuals and the wider community. The wider distribution of the individuals into much smaller local housing solutions normalises their accommodation situation, defuses the risks associated with the creation of a large complex for single homeless accommodation(bullying, harassment, intimidation, anti-social behaviours etc).”

“I think that smaller units of provision for those with less need of support and Housing First for those entrenched rough sleepers who really will never succeed in larger provision. Also those without addiction issues will be separated off so less chance of people being enticed into drug/alcohol use whilst in accommodation. Less problems with controlling behaviour on site as well. Economies of scale some will shout. However, if people are assessed prior to placement there will be less need for 24/7 care with a resultant saving on Housing Benefits. After all, figures show that those with complex needs in the homeless

population are in the minority.Canonsgrove could be used as a “somewhere safe to stay assessment hub” or a **small** satellite housing option for those **wishing** to live outside of the town centre.”

“I understand more than most from my time in local Govt and as an Executive Councillor for Housing that the best solution always is one of smaller multi occupancy accommodation throughout our community with the housing first model as a priority to get them individually in their own accommodation with the necessary support. It is here the Council should focus.”

Housing First: 29.7% support quite a few people liked the idea but thought that lack of move-on housing and financial implications made it less practicable. These people tended then to opt for multi-occupancy.

“The Housing First model should be the primary option but does not work for everyone. This should be supplemented by smaller multi-occupancy accommodation dispersed across Taunton rather than sizeable hub models.”

“Housing First Model with small casual unit back up is best. I know nothing about Canonsgrove but I do know about homeless people. As a priest I worked for forty years in urban parishes which always had a ministry to homeless people. Homeless people need to be seen as people who for a wide variety of reasons are without a home. They are people. The last thing they need is to be herded together in large numbers in accommodation that is well out of town and of course out of sight.”

The following was submitted without a choice made. It appears to cover much of what has gone before in a nutshell, even though it is recognised that an appreciable number of residents might not be happy with the inclusion of Canonsgrove as an option:

What do you think might be the best solution?

”This is very difficult to say on the information available. I fully support the provision of accommodation and services for homeless people. I recognise that homelessness is a product of many separate pressures on individual people. As such “the homeless” cannot be put into one category nor should it be assumed they all have the same needs. The “best solution” must take into account these individual needs (which will vary in complexity) and it is unlikely that any one facility would be able to meet all of these individual needs in one location. The homeless population need to have a voice in what is to be “provided for them” by others. The local community where any facility is located must also have a voice as to how that facility can safely and appropriately be incorporated into the community. I support Somerset West and Taunton working constructively and openly with locally elected representatives, service providers, church and community groups and the homeless themselves to develop an appropriate response-- whether this is at Canonsgrove or elsewhere.”

The contribution above ends by highlighting what has been missing all along: Somerset West and Taunton need to work **constructively** and **openly** in order to achieve the best outcome for all. It is time for them to step up to the mark and demonstrate transparency and due diligence.