

16/03/2016

Dear Sara and Lean

I phoned up about ten days ago, to congratulate you and your team on the excellent vision for Blandford + ' pre-submission plans. It was well presented and as an old Blandfordian, I must admit, it's a breath of fresh air. I was unable to come up to Bryanston Club on Sunday 13th due to other commitments but have read the plans thoroughly.

I'm a fourth generation Blandfordian, and very proud of our place in our Country's history. I left this great town in 1970 to join the Royal Navy and have only been home for short periods of a few months from time to time since leaving the Service back in 1995. I have recently returned from twenty years working in Egypt/Israel on a Multi-National Peace keeping mission, overseeing the 'Camp David' peace treaty. However, I've been back in UK for seven months now and in Blandford for most of the last three. Like many others who've worked away from their roots, I've been extremely disappointed about the way this beautiful town has been ripped apart and isolated by recent 'short term gain' initiatives, that simply will NOT suffice to sustain growth to keep our youth living/working in this area into the long or even medium term future. I've gone away for months at a time, only to return and find less social facilities available. The Army lads and many of our locals now drink and socialise in Wimborne. I see fewer pubs, fewer shops, less amenities and most of all, few places to park and none of them free. However, the appetite for building more and more private homes is still, it seems, insatiable. In recent years, even the brewery has taken up the 'real estate' business, (no surprise there really, I always was one of the only few who drank the local brew and actually liked it). One wonders how and why this is so, when so few proper amenities are being constructed/provided to accompany such gross contempt for the local populace. I'm glad this is now being addressed (or so we're told).

On that note, I would like to suggest some enhanced and more visionary ideas that could go that one step further than the excellent document you've already proposed. My ideas are coming from initiatives I've seen in my recent home in the UK (more about that can be provided later). What I'm saying is that all my ideas are easily achievable by the right minded folk. We need planners with long term visions, not builders with short term gain in mind. We need people who want to move forward and put right the terrible wrongs that have been implemented by developers over the last ten to fifteen years or so. Of course, this town would still be on the map if the railway had not been unceremoniously raped (yes raped) from under our feet, back in the late sixties. But now we can at least, partially, put this right for future generations. I am fortunate enough to be able to vividly remember the vibrant, busy place I grew up in. No one who lived in Dorset or Somerset at that time, wanted the railway to go. We were duped into believing the lame promises made about better transport routes and facilities, few of which, ever materialised. Even the bypass only guides people around the town, avoiding it all together, which is basically good from a logistical point of view, but doesn't encourage folk to visit our town.

What the town and the parishes need is a full development package along the lines of the 'neighbourhood plan'. But it also needs all citizens and businesses to work together to achieve this without thinking about how they can make a 'short term gain' as has been happening in recent years. We need cohesion where each plan dovetails into the next. What we don't need is a 'hotch-potch' of projects that get changed or withdrawn a few years later (like three schools, for some totally bizarre reason, that I don't even want to mention again).

Yes we need more housing. But we need the transport systems and links to all our villages which have been for too long, isolated from us in the town. We need the schools, community centres, surgery and sports facilities as laid out in the plans. Along with Stour Park (Flooding taken into account), we need a hub to the North East of the town (sunrise park), as envisaged in this outline plan, but with a full package of facilities to support the already large housing estates that already exist up there. I would humbly suggest the below.

SUNRISE PARK DEVELOPMENT SUGGESTIONS:

- A multi storey car park – (not a level car park as envisaged)
- A Supermarket in the vicinity but not necessarily within the current park (approach Lidl's first).
- A 'New Build' public house/Restaurant (on the lines of Marston's or Wetherspoons).
- An Odeon style multi-screen cinema.
- New build or existing vacant plots to be used for at least two smaller restaurants on the lines of Nandos and Frank and Bennys (I have a broader idea of how this can be achieved).
- A Hotel like Premier Inn or a Travelodge to accommodate our visitors and relatives visiting family in our locale. This would be great during the Georgian fair and Steam fair occasions. Also, the shuttles could be used to get folk to and from.
- A transport hub. Initially, this would be on the lines of a shuttle or 'park and ride' service to take visitors/tourists into the town (from the multi storey). This could also be the main bus terminal and hopefully, a National Express stop to link us to the outside World again. The main advantage of this initiative is the freeing up of at least some of the congestion in the town.
- Finally, plans for an 'Electro Magnetic Railway' to transport villagers from the Durweston/Shillingstone/Stourpaine areas to the town. The ones I've looked at are called MagLev (Magnetic levitation). Again, tender the idea out to foreign and European bidders; let them haggle for the deal.

All of above may well seem too visionary, and just a pipe dream that many of us talk about in the few remaining pubs/clubs around the town. But all of this can be done with outside bidders and by writing letters to people like Prince Charles, who is a great supporter of these kinds of initiatives. After all, look at how Poundbury in Dorchester has been expanded in recent years. HRH also has a Sister in Law' living in Stourpaine, so let's at least see what he thinks. I'm sure he's all for opening the steam railway from Shillingstone to Durweston halt.

After providing for our local community (All of North Dorset), our immediate goal should be to plan along the lines of making our town a stopping off point for tens of thousands of holiday makers and tourists who would otherwise just skirt the town on the bypass. So, build a hub in Sunrise, have these visitors have a lunch break in Sunrise and spread the word, and before long the multi-storey will fill up and the shuttle buses will quickly waft our visitors into town. At present we see the by-pass as a means to deter visitors, not draw them in. If done the right way, this will become a welcome break for travellers from the M4 on their arduous journey to Bournemouth, Poole, Swanage or Weymouth (Jurassic Coast). Equally, it will provide a long overdue entertainment facility for the folk who live in our own Parishes. Additionally, with good online advertising it will bring dedicated tourists to visit our Town, Museums and unusual church. They may even take a stroll along our trail way to view the AONB.

Pros and Cons of an EMR:

PROS:

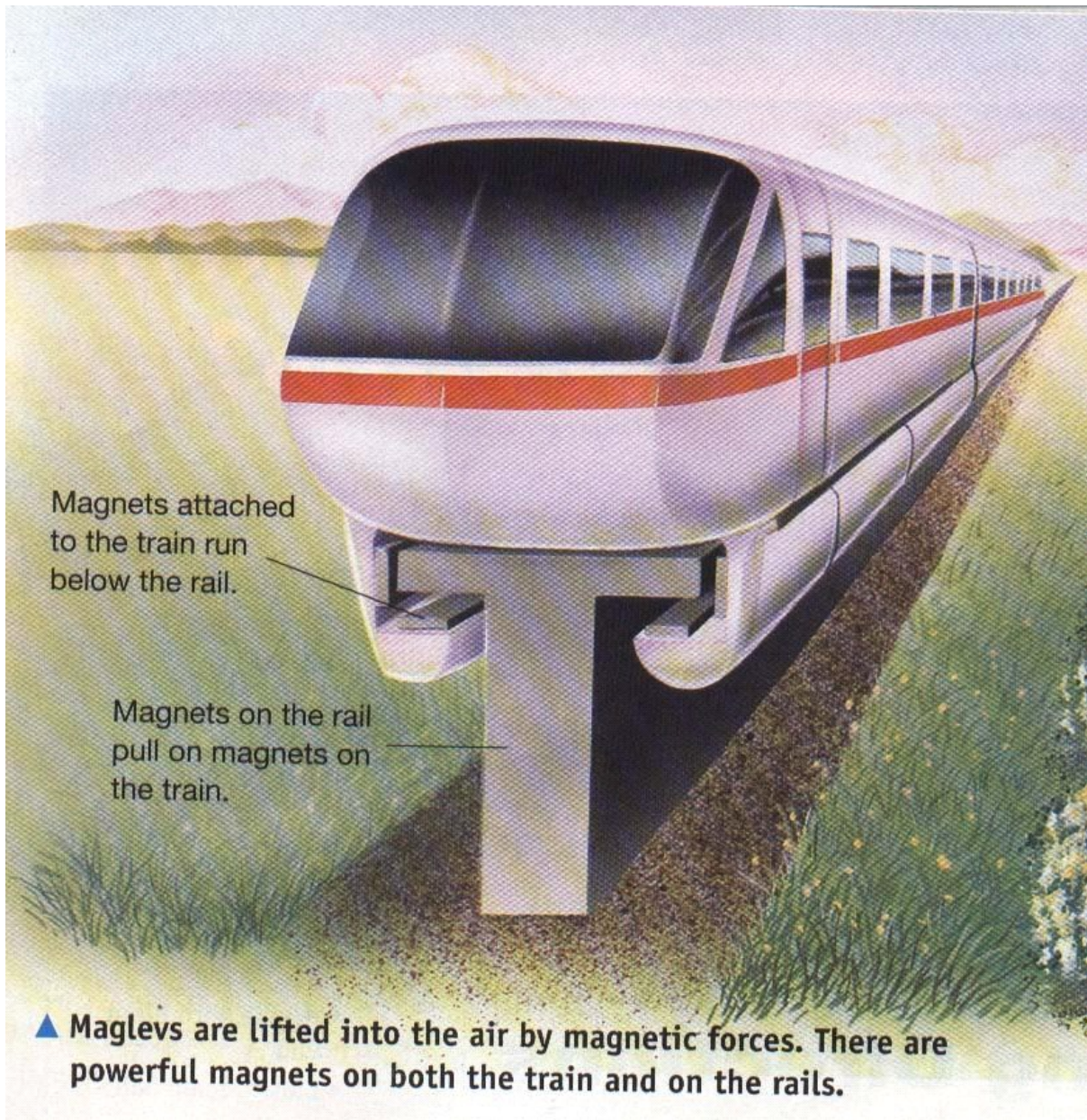
- Rather than encouraging visitors and passers' by to avoid the town, it would attract people to spend some time in or on the periphery of the town. It would also provide a great facility for those of us who live in the immediate AONB.
- A great way for OAPs to stay mobile, contribute a modest fee to fund the service, and still be able to see the AONB from an elevated vantage point.
- Eco friendly; low running cost; virtually no noise pollution; and able to provide multi-functionality. Once built, this mode of transport would be an asset for decades to come.
- It can be phased in slowly and added to. Eventually a loop to link around Letton and Stour Park could be constructed, thus encompassing the whole AONB and bringing Tourists/Visitors/workers and OAPs into the re-developed town.
- The Initial costs for the first section does not need to be too high as outside bidders can vie for the contract. With some Government support, lottery funding, and local fund raising, the foolish ness and 'short term gains' of the late sixties and early seventies to our logistical facilities; could finally be put right. Roads should never have replaced our rail network; all roads do is attract more cars and congestion. Additionally, they're certainly NOT eco-friendly. Instead road/rail and even rivers should be utilised together. That lesson has finally sunk in at central Government level, now it's our turn.

CONS: There are none (unless you're a pessimist).

It would be a great start to get lottery funding and Government support for the EMR and steam railway project for Shillingstone collectively. The Electro Magnetic style railway could start from Durweston Halt and along the bypass and up the gradient to Sunrise. This plan could be drawn up and then bids put out to various railway companies both in UK and abroad. As mentioned above, the Chinese have some brilliant Mag Lev railways (see below). These are eco-friendly, quiet and solar energy could be used for any extra electrical needs. Much of this could run alongside the existing bypass, so very little extra land needs to be taken up. The initial section may need to run parallel to the trail way but not disrupt walkers as concrete stanchions would raise it above the ground. I'm no engineer, but this has worked all over the World, why not here? Another advantage of an EMR rail system is that OAPs and the disabled could view the countryside without being jostled about on a bus. There may even be an option of using it at night to move cargo/parcels/mail etc.

Most of the above is achievable from outside sources; it just needs to be sold to the bidders that this is a great town to invest in (because it is). It also has to be sold to the nay-sayers. During my naval career we were taught to be positive and find a way around a problem, never be a pessimist. It seems however, in recent years the pessimists have won out. A lot of time and effort has gone into producing these plans; it would be a shame to waste them.

Finally, I'm currently residing in Blandford but will probably be going away again soon. I'd be happy to discuss in more details how I personally think my ideas could work. At least I feel the facilities up in the Sunrise Park should be adopted and I would be able to show you a comparison not so far from here where this kind of package development, has already been done, albeit in a much larger town.



Magnets attached to the train run below the rail.

Magnets on the rail pull on magnets on the train.

▲ **Maglevs are lifted into the air by magnetic forces. There are powerful magnets on both the train and on the rails.**