

Blandford+ Neighbourhood Plan (2)

Crown Meadows

Background:

Bryanston Deer Park, in recent years known as the Crown Meadows, was created for the Portman family in the 18th Century. Lying to the West of Blandford, Crown Meadows make a vital contribution to the historic context and landscape setting of Blandford Forum.

The 1970 Insall Report (Blandford Forum – Conserve & Enhance) noted that *“The intensely urban quality of the town centre is marvellously enhanced by the rural beauty of Bryanston Park, the River Stour and Bryanston Woods. The river is one of Blandford’s greatest but most underplayed assets . . . this is a delightful area full of opportunities for improvement and public enjoyment”*. The report also stressed that *“the striking Georgian quality of Blandford is apparent not only from within the town but also from outside, from the hills which encircle the town. Modern development immediately next to this Georgian core must not be allowed to swamp the distant view”*.

The Blandford, Blandford St. Mary and Bryanston Conservation Area was designated in 1972 to preserve and enhance Blandford’s historic character. It was expanded in 1990 and nine sub-areas within it were subsequently identified. Crown Meadows lies within Sub-Area VIII: River Stour Meadows.

World War II Anti-Tank Defences in Crown Meadows were awarded Grade 2 Listed Building Status by English Heritage in 2012.

Planning Chronology

North Dorset Adopted Local Plan (published 2003) Policy BL7 stated that *“The Crown Meadows and land north of the Milldown should remain as open countryside and protected from encroaching development which would jeopardize their use as informal recreational areas”*

Development potential for 200 houses on Crown Meadows was originally identified by North Dorset District Council (NDDC) in their Draft Core Strategy (published March 2010) as a ‘preferred option’ to accommodate housing development post 2016.

In August 2012 a petition signed by 5756 people opposed to the development of the Crown Meadows was presented to Liz Goodall, Chief Executive of North Dorset District Council.

In autumn 2012, public consultation was undertaken on key issues for the revision of the DCS and views were sought on reducing the proposed level of housing on the Crown Meadows site from 200 to 150 on the 5-hectare site. This reflected ‘concerns about the visibility of the development in the landscape and the setting of Blandford Forum, particularly in views from the bridge over the River Stour at the entrance to the town’

In a Draft of the North Dorset Local Plan 2011 to 2016 Part 1 (published 2013), Policy 16 stated *“In addition to infilling and redevelopment within the settlement boundary, Blandford’s housing needs will be met through: (h) the development of land to the west of Blandford Forum; New or improved facilities will include: (w) informal open space at Crown Meadows associated with housing development to the west of Blandford Forum.”*

NDDC commissioned a Heritage Assessment of Crown Meadows in 2014 in order to inform the soundness of Draft Policy 16. Section 7 of the document details an Analysis of Heritage Assets and the Impact of the Proposed Development at Crown Meadows (English Heritage). The assessment concluded that the proposed development *“would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area as a result of the intrusive nature of the proposed development spreading suburban development into a previously undeveloped area of land of significant historic and landscape importance.”*

Para 8.7 of the assessment also concluded that *“The overall impact of the proposed development on the significance of heritage assets would range from substantial harm to varying degrees of less than substantial harm to no harm at all. According to Paragraph 134 of the NPPF and Policy 5 of the Pre-Submission Local Plan, any degree of harm, no matter how slight, should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal and a clear and convincing justification will be required. However, given the information gathered to date serious concerns arise from the suggested proposed development and guidance within the NPPF paras 126 – 141 would apply.”*

NOTE: Paragraphs 126 (184)* to 141 (202)* in Section 12 (16)* of the 2012 NPPF relate to conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraph 126 (184)* states that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. (* 2018 NPPF).

The North Dorset Local Plan 2011 to 2016 Part 1 (published 2016) removed reference to Crown Meadow from Policy 16 and states that *“At least 1,200 homes will be provided at Blandford Forum and Blandford St Mary during the period 2011 - 2031. In addition to infilling and redevelopment within the settlement boundary, Blandford’s housing needs will be met through: g mixed-use regeneration of the Brewery site; and h the development of land to the south east of Blandford St Mary; and i the development of land to the west of Blandford St Mary (at Lower Bryanston Farm and Dorchester Hill).”*

The original Blandford+ Neighbourhood Plan (2016) endeavoured to increase protection by designating Crown Meadows as a Local Green Space. However, the examiner ruled that Crown Meadows did not meet the tests set out in Paragraph 77 of the National Planning Policy Framework for the allocation of Local Green Spaces, and subsequently instructed that policy 10.4 Crown Meadows be deleted from the Plan.

In 2018 NDDC commissioned a Conservation Area Appraisal to be carried out for the Blandford Conservation Area. The final report is not yet available, however, an early draft of the assessment states that *“The Crown Meadows (and Bryanston Park) are of vital importance in preserving the undeveloped setting of the town of Blandford and for enabling understanding its historic development. It forms part of the green undeveloped edge to the west of the town and lies within the Blandford, Blandford St Mary and Bryanston Conservation Area. It has two levels of interest, the first is its historical development and interest*



in its own right, the second in terms of its quality and role in providing a setting for the adjacent historic town of Blandford, Blandford St. Mary and a series of other grouped and individual heritage assets.”

Conclusion

Blandford+ Neighbourhood Plan (2) recognises that Crown Meadows is a highly valued and important defining feature in the setting of Blandford. The Steering Group also recognises that creating a ‘Settings’ policy within the plan will not necessarily prevent future development in the area. The key aims of the policy will therefore be to ensure that any future proposals clearly demonstrate how Crown Meadows will be preserved, protected and enhanced as a special setting.

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