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Planning Policy  
North Dorset District Council  
Nordon  
Salisbury Road  
Blandford Forum  
Dorset



17<sup>th</sup> January 2014

Dear Sirs

**Re : North Dorset Local Plan**

The purpose of this letter is to support the proposal to provide additional housing in the area of Blandford Forum on the site at St Mary's Hill, Blandford St Mary as opposed to the site in the Crown Meadows/Bryanston Deer Park. I can confirm that I have no financial or professional connection with either site. I am a practising architect working in and around the town for the last 36 years.

**Traffic**

Experience has shown that the employment pattern of those people living in the new estates around the town has been to work away from Blandford and therefore needing to travel some distance to work. In most cases this necessitates the use of at least one car per household. The car ownership on any development of 200 houses is going to generate anywhere between 200 – 400+ vehicles with their associated movements.

The St Mary's Hill site will have direct access to the A350 and the by-pass without the necessity of vehicles driving through the town. The Meadows site would only have access onto the one-way system around the town adding undoubtedly to the current congestion and pollution. In 1985, DCC predicted that despite the building of the by-pass the traffic flow through Blandford Forum town centre would eventually reach pre-by-pass figures – this must have happened by now! The damage to the historic fabric of the town was highlighted in the Insall Report which was a main driver for the by-pass. To add to the traffic flow through the town centre by the vehicles both residents' and service would only put the historic fabric further at risk, not to mention the additional pollution. To expect vehicles accessing the Meadows site to always go along Milldown Road and then the by-pass is false thinking. People are inherently lazy and will always take the quickest/shortest route which will inevitably be through the town. If vehicle movements

from the Meadows site are confined to the Milldown Road this will increase the danger to people using the hospital, the sports centre and the schools.

## **Ecology**

There is the world of difference between the two sites in terms of ecology. St Mary's Hill is ploughed (many times) agricultural land than has all the interventions associated with modern agriculture and the Meadows site is what it says – an area of unimproved grassland meadow. The chances of rare or protected species of flora and fauna, possible grassland fungi, on the St Mary's Hill site is very remote, however the chance of rare and/or protected species of all types on the Meadows site is very high.

“These meadows and pastures were once found in every parish of lowland England. They include the more **unusual floodplain meadows** with snake's-head fritillaries, and flood pastures with Marsh marigold. Most are the more typical flower-filled dry meadows, that were traditionally cut for hay.

**97% have been agriculturally improved or lost since 1940.**

There are less than 8000ha left.” (<http://grasslands-trust.org/lowland-meadows-and-pastures>)

The Dorset Wild Life Trust has estimated that 1579.4h of this is lowland meadows in Dorset –

<http://grasslands-trust.org/sites/glands.whitefusehub.com/files/files/The%20value%20of%20agri-environment%20schemes%20for%20species-rich%20grasslands%20-%20Deborah%20Watkins,%20Dorset%20Wildlife%20Trust.pdf>

Other counties have made particular studies of the rich biodiversity in historic deer parks and their agricultural archaeology –

([http://www.norfolkbiobiodiversity.org/pdf/reportsandpublications/Norfolk%20Deer%20Parks%20\\_Rob%20Liddiard\\_.pdf](http://www.norfolkbiobiodiversity.org/pdf/reportsandpublications/Norfolk%20Deer%20Parks%20_Rob%20Liddiard_.pdf))

Serious consideration needs to be given if the Meadows site is to be developed because it will be at the loss of a great deal of valuable and ever declining ecology.

## **Visual Impact**

The draft new Local Plan, in its comment on the St Mary's site, expresses concern on the matter of visual impact. NDDC have already accepted the visual impact of the Bryanston Hills development which can be seen from many vantage points in and around the town.

It would appear that somebody has not looked at the contours of both sites. Whilst the 55m contour runs through both sites St Mary's lies in a slight valley whereas Bryanston Hills lies along a slight ridge particularly at the top near where the old Dorchester Road ends adjacent to the by-pass, thus making it more visible and more of an intrusion into the skyline around the edge of the town. Also the growth of development along Ward's Drove is far more visible as again it lies on a slight ridge as is obviously deemed acceptable by NDDC as is the visual impact of Bryanston Hills.

### **Flooding**

The recent inclement weather should be a further warning to any proposed development in or near a flood plain. The geology of the two sites is completely different and will have a major impact on how the surface water discharge on both, if they were to be developed, could be dealt with to meet the current requirements of SUDs.

The geology of the two could not be more different – one in thin topsoil on underlying chalk and the other rich alluvial topsoil on underlying gravels. The former is manifestly better for returning surface water discharge to the aquifers. The latter site inevitably will have a higher water table and runs the risk of flooding making the most practical solution for discharging the surface water for the development a scheme of piping it to the river which is not the purpose of the current SUDs design requirements –

"Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) are drainage solutions that provide an alternative to the direct channelling of surface water through networks of pipes and sewers to nearby watercourses.

By mimicking natural drainage regimes, SuDS aim to reduce surface water flooding, improve water quality and enhance the amenity and biodiversity value of the environment. SuDS achieve this by lowering flow rates, increasing water storage capacity and reducing the transport of pollution to the water environment.

The need for alternative drainage such as SuDS is likely to increase to meet environmental challenges such as climate change and population growth. Provision for SuDS and the national standards required for their design, construction, maintenance and operation is included in the Flood and Water Management Act 2010." - <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/suds/>

### **Conclusion**

The a high proportion of the population in Blandford Forum the decision as to which of the site is to be developed is, in the current parlance, a "no-brainer" – it has to be St Mary's Hill.

NDDC must not be overawed by the power of "heavy weight" applicants, e.g. Tesco, the Crown Estates or any other large organisation, in their decision making, who undoubtedly have more financial resources to throw at their applications than the local council. Any threat of appeal in the light of an unfavourable decision that may be made or hinted at should be ignored. Legal advice to members may be cautionary, but they should remember who it is that elects them to office!

