

Barlavington Whole Estate Plan

January 2021 Consultation “Towards a Whole Estate Plan for Barlavington Estate” online exhibition

Fittleworth Parish Council Comments:

Summary

The Parish Council thank both the Barlavington Estate and their consultants Rural Solutions for the opportunity to comment on this emerging Whole Estate Plan (WEP). We note that this is not a consultation on a draft the WEP itself, but rather seeking views on some of the themes and objectives that are emerging from the initial stages of that project.

Because of this, our comments will also be necessarily high level – and we look forward to being given an opportunity to see and comment on the draft WEP as it moves through the stages towards the objective of endorsement by the South Downs National Park Authority.

As you know, Fittleworth Parish covers the northernmost extent of the Barlavington Estate, with land and property owned by the Estate extending right into the historic core of our village. The Plan below shows approximately how the Estate boundary overlaps with that of Fittleworth Parish (shaded blue).



For obvious reasons therefore, the Parish Council take an active interest in the parts of the WEP that detail projects lying within our Parish – but we are also conscious that some projects lying outside of our boundary will have a direct impact on our residents – either due to the likelihood of larger scale impacts arising, or because it concerns land that is of particular value to people living in our Parish.

For the most part, there is much contained within the consultation materials that is supported. This is perhaps not surprising given that one of the purposes of producing a WEP is to demonstrate how the objectives of the Estate are aligned with those of the National Park – which have in turn provided a framework for our own Neighbourhood Development Plan. It is clear that there is much overlap.

However, the Parish – and the wider Village – remain opposed to any future possibility of sand extraction at Horncroft Farm and Coates, and it is a cause of some concern that the WEP consultation makes continued mention of the sand reserves that lie within the Estate boundary. That concern is of course much heightened by the concurrent application for borehole testing at Coates (application SDNP/21/00901/17K) and of local reports that this work has commenced prior to the end of the 28 day period following notification. Whilst the Estate is of course free to ascertain the extent of mineral reserves within its boundaries – the timing of this is particularly unfortunate as it serves to colour our response to the WEP.

The following comments are set out under the headings used for the various fact sheets:

Organic Farming

The Parish note and support the commitment to Organic Farming and are particularly pleased to see that the reported Nitrate levels have reduced since 2004. This of course should be seen in the context of a general downward trend in nitrates since the introduction of NVZs in the 1990s – so it would be good for the WEP to express how the farming practices promoted by the Estate have reduced nitrates in comparison against the overall trend.

In addition to the testing carried out at Barlavington Stud – we would be keen to know how nitrate levels within the River Rother at Fittleworth – where the Estate’s farming practices will have a direct affect - have changed over a similar period.

Besley Farm

Whilst the improvements made here are applauded, it would be good to understand how the practices carried out here have informed farming practices across the wider Estate – and link up in order to help drive biodiversity improvements across the local area more widely – including by working with other landowners.

Restoring Heathland

As owners of a much smaller area of Heathland at Hesworth Common – the Parish Council is well aware of the challenges of managing and restoring such areas. Also, we know that many people from the village regularly visit and value Lords Piece, Sutton Common and the

neighbouring Coates Common as part of the mosaic of natural habitats that make this such a great part of the world to live.

The Serpents Trail links these areas together – and this Bridleway (No. 706) together with Bridleway 762 provides an important recreational asset for residents of all ages.

We think that this section could be enhanced by explaining how the lessons learnt through the management of Lords Piece – which the Estate is clearly passionate about – have extended across neighbouring habitats of a similar character – including by working in partnership with other landowners. We would also like to see a commitment to not only welcoming dog walkers here – but to promoting and encouraging access to Bridleways by recreational cyclists – including by exploring ways of increasing access by creating new permissive routes that serve to create circular walking and cycling routes and relieve recreational pressure on the existing network.

Moon Copse, The Hangers, Longe Copse, Duncton Mill, Deer Management

These parts of the Estate are further away from our Parish and so of only limited relevance.

Wood from our Wood

In passing, we would like to reiterate our sincere thanks for the timber that the Estate provided to our village shop. The value of this timber goes beyond the financial saving created by not having to buy wood from elsewhere – and the fact that the shop is clad in timber that was grown just down the road helps to root this building in the landscape and enhance its sense of place. Providing wood locally also helps to save carbon – especially when much timber used in the construction industry comes from the other side of the planet.

We were a little surprised therefore that timber from the Estate is being used to fuel a CHP facility in Kent. Whilst this may perhaps not be far to travel on a global scale – it is a shame that timber grown locally cannot find a use locally, and we would be keen for the WEP to explore ways in which locally sourced timber can be used more locally – perhaps by setting up some sort of local incentive scheme so local residents can source logs at a reduced rate compared with the open market.

Woodlands – a secret future

The trees in our shared landscapes have a multifunctional role – they help to mitigate climate change by sequestering carbon, but they also act as repositories for biodiversity as well as providing a backdrop for people to experience all the physical and mental benefits provided by access to nature.

Whilst we understand the need to ensure that our wooded areas are able to adapt to climate change – and so the species we plant may need to change as temperature and rainfall increases – it is important that new species are selected to both enhance biodiversity and local character. It is important to strike a balance, and we would not support a return to the practices of the recent past where monocultural plantations of non-native trees were introduced because they were easier or quicker to grow than our native species.

Silica Sand

As noted above, our village is strongly opposed to any proposals to extract sand of any type at Horncroft and Coates – and we have been consistent in that opposition for decades.

As previously expressed, our concerns centre on the very real degradation to our local landscapes – which are now of course further protected by the creation of the National Park – as well as the likelihood of any large-scale mineral workings would have on local tranquillity and so quality of life for our residents.

We note that the sand reserves have been safeguarded under the emerging SDNPA/WSCC Minerals Plan – but safeguarding reserves such as this is designed to ensure that nothing happens that might prejudice the ability of future generations to make use of this sand, if – and it is a big if – working reserves in a protected and valuable landscape becomes unavoidable.

The Parish Council are therefore extremely concerned that the WEP contains a commitment by the Estate to ‘enable’ the extraction of these reserves and given the likely timetable of the WEP (understood to be 15 years) we think it would be more appropriate for it to commit to NOT permit the extraction of sand reserves during this period – so that local residents can continue to enjoy the special landscapes in our area without fear that they might be taken away.

In terms of the recent planting undertaken to try and reduce the visual impact of any future workings, we note that it will be some years before these trees will have grown to a height where they will have any effect. We have also received local reports that the non-native species planted (acacia) is not appropriate and will itself create unwanted landscape impacts.

We also note that the area around the historic Coates pit is extremely sensitive in landscape terms – being on the opposing side of the Rother valley from the village including important and sensitive viewpoints such as at Hesworth Common (see image below). This area also borders the Coates Conservation Area which itself contains a large number of listed buildings – also the case at Horncroft.

We therefore simply cannot see a way in which the stated objective of sand extraction can be carried out without excessive and entirely undesirable effects in terms of landscape degradation, loss of cultural heritage, tranquillity and quality of life. Including this section within the WEP results in an unbalanced document and tends to make the more positive aspects of the document entirely incredible.

The views set out above are of course, made without prejudice to comments made on any future application.



View of Coates from Hesworth Common Trig Point

Housing and Enterprise

As with other local Estates – the provision made by Barlavington of affordable housing to rent is a particular benefit and as a village we are keen to ensure that this continues. We would therefore be keen for the WEP to commit to continuing to provide housing for people with local connections – e.g. through an agreed lettings policy.

Similarly, we are also aware of the value that Barlavington’s commercial tenants bring to the area – both in terms of providing local employment opportunities and enabling local provision of goods and services. This helps to contribute to making Fittleworth more sustainable. We would therefore be keen for the WEP to express a ‘commercial first’ approach to the conversion of redundant agricultural buildings.

Similarly, we would also support the provision of well-located and appropriate tourist accommodation and it feels like an omission for the WEP consultation not to make mention of potential sites for camping, following the unsuccessful application last year.

Lastly in relation to Barlavington tenants – we continue to be saddened by the restriction on access to the waterside of the River Rother at Fittleworth because the bank has been let to an angling society. Obviously, this generates an income – but this presumably small financial benefit that this brings to the Estate is to a large extent counteracted by the negative feelings that ‘keep out’ sites will generate within our community. We would welcome a revised approach to the management of, and access to, our river.

Conserving Built Heritage

As noted above, we would be keen for redundant barns to be used for commercial uses in the first instance, since this brings employment and economic benefits to our rural community.

However, we recognise that some buildings will not be viable in such uses – and the WEP provides an opportunity for a comprehensive strategy for how these buildings might be delivered as a viable group – whereby higher value uses are directed into the most appropriate locations, and enabling less well located barns to be used for lower impact uses.

Cultural and Social Heritage

No comments

Energy and Climate Change

As demonstrated in this section, the planting of trees and restoration of heathland habitats can help to sequester carbon – and under the emerging Environmental Land Management subsidy regime it may well be that landowners such as the Barlavington Estate become more incentivised to do this.

However, we feel that an Estate such as Barlavington has a role in helping to reduce the production of carbon in the first place – by encouraging patterns of development which reduce the need to travel and helping local people source food, fuel and sustainable building materials as closely to the source of production as possible. Such measures do not always produce the best outcome in terms of financial income – but they are vital in terms of supporting moves to a low carbon economy.

As noted above – there is of course a tension within this consultation between measures that seek to delivery sustainable development outcomes – in this case reducing atmospheric carbon – and the inclusion of a large-scale silica sand extraction site.

The link between silica sand and fracking is well documented and understood – and if sand extracted on the Estate were to be used as part of the fracking industry – with all the attendant environmental damage and resultant emissions – then the climate change and energy objectives of the WEP would be absolutely reversed. We would encourage the Estate to address this point through future versions of the WEP because as it stands, much of the positive aspects of the WEP appear insincere at best.

Ecosystem Services

Whilst this section raises many points that are welcomed – it is suggested that it would be more beneficial to identify which of the listed Services are delivered because the Estate WANT to – not HAVE to, e.g. in order to access subsidy funding or comply with environmental regulations.

We are sure that there are many things that fall into the ‘want’ category – but at present it is hard for people to understand what they are.