

CHURCH FIELD, FELPHAM.

1) BACKGROUND:

Church Field is a pocket of land that lies within the Felpham Parish Boundary. It is some 4 Hectares in size and is the only piece of land in Felpham “of historic interest as it is the only field left remaining in Felpham where William Blake wrote "Jerusalem", is in the area covered by his watercolour Felpham landscape, now in the Tate and is therefore a vital part of Felpham's unique identity”.

It has as its boundary with St Mary's Church and North Way to the south, Felpham Way to the north, the Felpham Allotments & Gardens Society (FAGS) to the east and Rife Way to the west. It is owned by the Lyon's Family Trust and managed on its behalf by Strutt & Parker (Chichester), and is currently used for farming/agricultural purposes.

2) THE ISSUES:

Church Field is perceived as a valued open space within Felpham, acting as a buffer to the increasing development of Felpham and is the only “strategic gap” left within the Parish.

It was designated as public open space in Arun District Council's Local Plan (1996 -2011) land use guidelines in April 2003, as follows:

“Church Field, Felpham – this is an area of approximately 4 hectares in the local gap between Felpham and Bognor Regis (Policy Area 11 – Strategic and Local Gaps). It is an open site with no existing buildings and is currently in agricultural use. Housing development abuts the site on its western boundary.

Type of Use Proposed: both informal and formal recreation may be appropriate, although it is important to maintain an open appearance to the site”.

The above mentioned Local Plan has now expired, pending the replacement Local Plan for the period 2013 -2026, and in this respect the above mentioned protection could be seen as ceasing to exist until the adoption of the new Local Plan. This time gap, between the two plans, could conceivably therefore be used by potential developers and/or the landowner to make a formal planning application(s) for the development of the site.

Arun District Council have stated that they have in place, in the period between the old and new Local Plans, a range of saved policies which will ensure that development is controlled. These will be saved until they are replaced by new policies in an adopted development plan, or are no longer compliant with national or regional planning policy. This is proven within the Arun District Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) Update 2012, Appendix 6 Rejected Sites, (Site Reference 108) where the reason for rejection from

development of Church Field is stated as “the site is protected New Open Space in the adopted Local Plan and is therefore unsuitable for development”.

It has been stated that the area could be likely to be subject to protection under consideration of flooding issues although the current Environment Agency Flooding Maps do not show Church Field to be either within an area that would suffer flooding from rivers or sea without defences or an area that would be affected in any extreme flooding situation. It should therefore be recognised that this, as an argument for protection, should not be pursued, unless circumstances and future information necessitate reconsideration. *Due to the slope of the land, the western end is in wet weather almost marsh like and drains into the ditch.*

3) PAST & CURRENT HOUSING ALLOCATIONS FOR FELPHAM:

Arun District Council have housing targets (including affordable housing targets) to meet and are responsible for the allocation of these throughout the District.

Currently Felpham meets the requirements for both private and affordable housing, and have a zero allocation proposed for the 2013-2026 period.

An electronic survey/petition by the Greener Bognor Network and a hard copy survey was carried out during the summer/autumn of 2012 from which a document titled “Proposal to Arun District Council – to include Church Field (formerly Pease Croft) in the Felpham Village Conservation Area” was produced. This was sent to Felpham Parish Council requesting its support and for inclusion within the Neighbourhood Plan. **It was noted that inclusion of Church Field within the Conservation Area would not stop any planning applications for its development, all it would do would be to ensure that development would have to be in a “style” reflecting that it was within a Conservation Area.**

The document was reported to the Neighbourhood Plan Committee on 15th October 2012, where the meeting was advised that, prior to any decision on extending the Conservation Area to include Church Field being made by the Parish Council, that clarification would need to be received on the impact of such a proposal, specifically in relation to what could and couldn't be done with the land in the future. In this respect the Parish Council had contacted the District Council requesting answers to the following:

Should Church Field be part of a Conservation area, would this:

- * *Stop or change or enhance any Housing proposals?*
- * *Stop or hinder any future proposals for Allotments?*
- * *Stop or hinder any future proposals for Green Burials?*
- * *Stop or hinder any future proposals for other types of Recreational Activities?*

* *Would there be any other impact(s) that may be detrimental or beneficial to the community?*

It was agreed that any further discussion on this be put on hold pending further information and clarification from Arun District Council.

Arun District Council were approached on 4th October 2012 by e-mail for clarification on the above, a follow up e-mail was sent on 23rd October 2012, as no response had been received. A response was subsequently received, on the 29th October 2012, which was as follows:

“Conservation area status provides additional protection from unsympathetic development which might otherwise destroy an area's special character. From a planning point of view including an area within a conservation area means that a duty placed is placed on the Council to preserve or enhance the features that make it unique (including its setting). This means that in practice, the Council will carefully consider all applications to ensure that they have a positive impact on them. Therefore, new development will only be permitted provided that it:-

- * achieves high quality design that is sympathetic with the scale and character of the area,
- * uses relevant materials,
- * does not result in the loss of important open spaces or any features of interest, and
- * does not affect any views into, out of, and within the conservation area.

Proposals which would have a negative impact will be resisted.

Church Field has had a number of applications on it including one for a change of use from agriculture to public open space and a green cemetery. This application was approved conditionally in 2000.

Were the field be included in the conservation area, the District Council will have to assess any potential impact of a proposal on the character and appearance on the conservation area. As the area has always been a field/open space it may be the case that this use is an important element of the character that should be preserved. In addition, an important element or characteristic is the open spaciousness it provides to the setting of the church and village. This is an important feature that should also potentially be preserved.

However, it is worth noting that certain uses such as green burials or outdoor amenity space will have less of an impact than others and may be supported.

The Council has a duty to review the all of Conservation Areas to assess if they have changed over the years. If significant change has occurred or

if additional areas of special interest are identified, the boundary may be amended. This is the issue that currently exists with the Felpham Conservation Area. A review of the conservation area is currently underway and will consider a boundary change as part of this.

It is also worth noting that as it currently stands, any proposals for development will be assessed for their impact on the setting of the both the Conservation Area along with that of the listed church”.

Parish Council Members, in light of the above were requested, at that time, as to

whether to support the proposal at this stage or to defer a decision pending

further Neighbourhood Plan data, also taking into account the above information.

It was agreed that further information was still required.

4) CONVENING OF A PARISH MEETING ON CHURCH FIELD

It was perceived that the Parish Council was not in support of the inclusion of

Church Field to within the Felpham Conservation Area.

A Parish Meeting was called by 6 residents of Felpham as per the requirements laid down in the Local Government Act 1972. The wording on this was “***We the undersigned are writing to call for a public Parish meeting on 11 or 12 April after 6p.m. to call for a referendum on the inclusion of Church Field in the Conservation Area. This is acting under Part 3, schedule 12, paragraph 18 sub paragraphs 4 &5 of the Local Government Act 1972***”.

The meeting was held on 11th April 2013 at the St Mary’s Centre, Felpham.

Martyn White (Conservation Officer for Arun District Council) spoke at this meeting on the review that was currently being carried out on the Felpham Conservation Area and some misconceptions being expressed. He confirmed that a review of Conservation Areas was carried out every five years and that Felpham would be amongst the first in this coming review.

He advised that he would be, as part of the review, carrying out a public consultation (during the summer months) on any and all proposals that came out of the work he was doing, for presentation to Arun District Council for ratification and/or amendments and subsequent adoption. He outlined the Committee process that this would go through at Arun.

The final outcome of the parish meeting was that the Parish Council would reconsider its position on the inclusion of Church Field to within the Felpham Conservation Area.

5) POST PARISH MEETING DECISIONS

A special meeting of Felpham Parish Council was convened on 22nd April 2013

“To discuss a proposal, to be presented by Councillor G Farrell, that bearing in mind the review into Felpham’s Conservation Area that currently being carried out by Arun District Council, Felpham Parish Council supports the inclusion of Church Field within a Felpham Conservation Area”.

Proposal made by Councillor G Farrell and seconded by Councillor M Harvey. Before a vote was made Councillor G Farrell asked if there were any Councillors present who did not wish to see Church Field being included within a Felpham Conservation Area. There were none.

An amendment was put forward by Councillor Mrs M Harvey and seconded by Councillor M Harvey, which was subsequently withdrawn.

On a vote of 10 Councillors for the proposal, as worded above, with one abstention, the proposal made by Councillor G Farrell was carried.

Arun District Council were advised of the Parish Council’s decision on 25th April 2013. The Parish Council’s decision was also then reflected in the policies of its Neighbourhood Plan.

The following policy relating to Church Field (and other Local Green Spaces) was agreed by the Neighbourhood Plan Committee on 15th April 2013 and by a Special Meeting of the Main Council on 30th April 2013 and was as follows:

Policy

11C Develop opportunities for participation in sport and leisure activities	11C-P1- Opportunities to increase play provision and open spaces will be supported particularly in the north west of the parish.
	11C-P2 - Existing open space including school playing fields, outdoor sport and recreational land should not be built on. Development of recreational buildings will be supported provided that the design and scale of development is in keeping with the character of the location
	11C-P3 - Existing allotment sites will not be built upon and opportunities to provide further sites will be supported subject to the impact on surrounding land.
	11C-P4 - Redevelopment of areas shown on the Proposals Map as Local Green Spaces, including Church Field, will not be supported

