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Mr B Webb
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Dear Mr Webb

Consultation Response by Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Council

Draft Piddle Valley Conservation Area Review

Following a public meeting with approximately 70 Parishioners attending, Councillors have now fully considered the draft document. In addition to commenting on the Review itself, the Parish Council would like to bring to the attention of Officers that local knowledge is directly relevant to architectural and historic interest, as well as the strong sense of unique place and setting, all pivotal considerations when it comes to defining the conservation area.

Overall the Parish Council is not persuaded that the significant reduction of landscape surrounding historic settlements will more appropriately focus the designation. This is most strongly felt with regard to the proposal to remove the water-meadows.

Comments and feedback have been summarised under the following headings;

- Water-meadows
- Field at the South West end of Bladen Valley
- Structures associated with the former Bladen estate's water storage and distribution system
- Grading Assessment of existing properties

Water-meadows

The Council considers that the water-meadows comprise architectural structures in their own right, retain unique and historic features as well as cementing the relationship of the settlement with the river Piddle and creating a strong sense of place.

There are many “built” structures on the water-meadows such as masonry channels, arches and sluice gates, some of which are still in working order; collectively they contribute to the Parishes rich heritage and the character of the area.

The first known active use of water-meadows is recorded in Affpuddle. Their continued connection to the settlement is still very relevant today given the socio-agricultural heritage that is a legacy of the Bladen Estate to the entire Parish, evidenced generally across the present conservation area.

Across the water-meadows there exists a patch work of footpaths and bridleways that provide valued amenity access to local people and tourists. The water-meadows, together with their associated man-made structures make up a site of special historic interest. The Parish Council considers that their continued protection is essential for the future, thus enabling the continuing understanding of their historic importance.

The Council considers that the water-meadows (original floodplain land) should be retained within the boundary of the Piddle Valley Conservation Area.

Field at the South West end of Bladen Valley

The Council considers that this field should be retained within the boundary of the Conservation Area. It considers the proximity of the land to form an immediate setting to Bladen Valley, a very important area made up of listed buildings, central to the Bladen Estate, which remains an important site in terms of agricultural heritage.

Structures associated with the former Bladen estate’s water storage and distribution system

The Parish Council would like to bring to the attention of Officers the need to include in the considerations of the “built environment” the structures associated with the former Bladen estate’s water storage and distribution system, which are on the hillside to the south of Briantspuddle village. These are in a dilapidated state at present, but could well be candidates for academic investigation or even restoration at some future time, and should certainly be protected from further deterioration and destruction. It may be there are other related structures elsewhere, but these are two that Members know about.

1. Following the south-going footpath at the eastern edge of Briantspuddle village, the path takes one uphill through a small copse and then over a stile into a field. Alongside the path at this point is a cistern built in rendered brick or block work topped by a mechanism containing two semi-circular discs, one fixed and one arranged originally to slide up or down according to the level of water inside. The cistern and mechanism are seriously dilapidated now (not to mention the tree growing on top), but when working the two semi-discs would have been far apart when the cistern was full and close together forming a complete circle when it was empty, providing a signal of the state of this water supply visible from the farm in the valley below. It is believed the cistern was fed from a spring, and the abbreviation “spr” appears nearby on the 1:25,000 OS Explorer map no 117. The approximate grid reference is Y820929.

2. A much larger circular cistern is situated in what is now woodland to the south of the group of cottages known as The Hollow. To get to it one has to take the south-going Jubilee Trail footpath uphill until it levels out and then seek out the cistern in the trees to the left of the path. (This is private land belonging to the Neil family.) Next to the cistern is a pumping system, designed for operation by hand chain or by belt drive; this looks to be in relatively good condition. It is marked as “w” (well) on the 1:25,000 map and the grid reference is SY825929.



1. Small cistern with signalling device.



2. Large round cistern with pump.

Grading Assessment of existing properties

The Parish Council is concerned by the categorisation in the document where buildings are considered as having a “Positive, Negative or Neutral” contribution to the Conservation Area. There appears to be no definition of each category, instead rather emotive language is used, which may have caused unintended and unnecessary offense to home owners.

However, of particular concern is the key wording;

“Whilst improvements or change here (regarding “neutral” properties), may deliver benefits, they are unlikely to be as significant as for those marked negative. Use of this appraisal to inform the design assessment of planning proposals helps to ensure that conservation objectives are achieved through the planning process”.

There appears to be no detail or firm idea about how the “negative” properties could be “improved” and as such consideration will be open to the widest possible subjective judgement. It is also a very strange comment when many of the buildings were approved with the consent of conservations officers.

The Affpuddle and Turnerspuddle Parish Plan adopted by Parishioners contains its own Design Statement and concludes as follows;

“The expressed desire of the community is that the design and materials used in new development, in whatever form it takes, should harmonise with the existing built environment. Whilst some future development will undoubtedly imitate the traditional cob and thatched cottages, the parish does not wish to stagnate in a mythical rural time warp and will always consider innovative design and use of materials where it is appropriate to do so.”

The Council would like to see this approach adopted for the assessment and categorisation of existing properties reconsidered by Officers, and for the revision to take into account the Design Statement contained in the Parish Plan.

Conclusion

In conclusion The Parish Council sees no compelling reason to reduce the boundary of the established conservation area. Members believe that both the Council and Parishioners are more closely aligned with the aims and objectives of the 1987 conservation area review. At the time the

review considered “Within a designated conservation area certain legal provisions apply, and it is the character of areas, rather than individual buildings, that the conservation area legislation seeks to preserve or enhance.”

Following the 1987 Review, the conservation boundary was incorporated into the Parish Plan, which is still used by the Parish Council as a guiding document following its democratic adoption by Parishioners. Members would urge Officers to incorporate the above comments into a revised document, and would welcome its resubmission to the Parish Council for further review once changes have been made.