



East Woodhay Parish Council

The Parish Field, Woolton Hill:

The Deed of Gift of the Parish Field to the Parish Council was made in 1959 with the covenant that the PC was not to permit the use of the land “otherwise than for agricultural purposes” and that it would “not erect any buildings whatsoever”. Over the elapsed time the PC still have ownership of the field and have kept to the spirit of the covenant. Indeed at the present time the Parish Field is poor quality agricultural land and is tenanted, generating a peppercorn rent.

In recent years the PC have received pressure from the community to “do something with this space”, a view which has increased with the continued growth of Woolton Hill. Included in these suggestions has been support for a permissive path, which now allows the field, with its extensive views, to be enjoyed by everyone, including those who may not be so firm on their feet, as well as enabling a safer route to and from the schools and the doctors’ surgery.

The PC have also received many ideas, which have included building community structures on the land, which we consider would not be in keeping with original bequest.

With the range of suggestions being very diverse, we are aware that we need to maintain the right balance and protect the field in keeping with the spirit of the covenant, and we remain committed to the maintenance of the Parish Field for agricultural purposes whilst utilising it as a treasured community asset in line with the broader community wishes.

To try to ensure this is achieved over the coming years it is our experience that land which is actively enjoyed by the community is better protected from development than unused poor quality greenspace, even that with a covenant. Therefore, the PC has installed the all-weather path across the field to enable community use all year round.

The only general public access on the Parish Field will be by use of the Permissive Path and we will continue to put up signage to emphasise that the rest of the field is not for general use. We do not feel that the installation of a sympathetically designed path is detrimental to the field, and that its use by the community allows the PC to demonstrate its importance at the heart of the village and thereby maintain the ideals of the covenant.

We additionally wish to utilise the Parish Field to assist with local efforts to combat the “Climate Emergency”. Our medium term vision for the field is therefore to complement the broader actions of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, Hampshire Council (HC) and nature organisations by seeking to improve the biodiversity of the Parish Field. Again, we feel this is very much in keeping with the covenant. The PC will engage with the community to achieve this increased biodiversity and we will seek to gain the active support of our schools.

In conclusion, the PC will retain ownership of the Parish Field and maintain it as an open protected greenspace, with no buildings, to be enjoyed by the community. We will enhance its biodiversity and will continue to let the land for agricultural use, ensuring its hedges are cut and ditches maintained.

The PC will retain the right to close the permissive path, which is not a public right of way, whenever it deems it appropriate or necessary.