

David Trethewey, Divisional Director, Strategy and Performance and Andy Thomas, Strategic Manager- Communities attended the meeting. They came in response to a request the Parish Council made, via Councillor Alison Millar, that someone from BANES would talk to us about their plans for the land they own on Bathampton Meadows.

The Officers explained that they do not develop policy, that was the remit of the elected councillors, but they were responsible for delivering policy once made. They said that at the present time there was no policy or plan to do anything with the land and the current administration had undertaken not to build a park and ride on the Meadows. They also said that it was not in the Council's thinking to sell the land.

Councillors asked how we could protect the land against future administrations developing plans that would involve building on the Meadows.

The Officers asked if we had a neighbourhood plan. We explained that we had decided not to do one as we understood that the protection offered by being in the green belt was as strong as any protection a neighbourhood plan would offer. The officers agreed.

They suggested we consider registering the land as an Asset of Community Value (ACV). The owner of an asset of community value must inform the local authority if they wish to sell the asset. If a group wants to buy the asset, they can trigger a moratorium for six months, to give them a chance to raise the money to purchase the asset. The owner does not have to sell to a community group. The asset of community value listing only improves the chances of community groups being able to purchase by providing more time to raise funds. It does not require the owner to sell at a discount. In particular they stressed that where the council was the owner of the ACV they had to demonstrate that they had obtained best value in any sale. We explained that this had limited value to us as our concern was really what BANES might do with the land they own. Even if the land was accepted to be registered as an ACV this would not stop BANES building on it. The officers explained that ACV status is a material consideration in a planning application and can be used by the Planning Inspectorate as a factor in refusing planning permission for change of use.

The Officers said that the process for registering an asset was fairly straight forward and they would support us in doing it. They described it as a light touch test with a low bar. In particular they undertook to send us a link to the form and provide the information needed for the application related to ownership and maps of the land. The process was an 8 week turnaround and they had to consult with the landowner(s). One requirement was to show that the ACV provided social value to the community – heritage value may not be enough. Given this anything we did to extend the community use of the Meadows would help the case.

The Council concluded there was little to be gained from registering the Meadows as an ACV other than that it might hold some weight in planning or put off a potential purchaser who wanted to build on the Meadows. It was agreed that if the application process was as straightforward as the Officers implied then there was also little downside in applying.

The officers also agreed to provide information on exactly what they owned in Bathampton as neither was sure.