

BINEGAR PARISH COUNCIL

The Fair Field

Background

The Fair Field is off Station Road, next to the Cemetery and Churchyard. It wraps round between Churchyard and ex-school. The Diocese of Bath & Wells owns the field.

Mendip District Council designates the field (except for the part between Churchyard and ex-school) as a *Protected Recreation Space*. Mendip's new draft *Local Plan* proposes to extend this protection to the area between Churchyard and school.

The Diocese unsuccessfully applied twice to build a house between Churchyard and school.

Current position

The Diocese is a charity and must show it is using its assets to support its charitable purposes.

After the failure of its planning applications, the Diocese has started to discuss the future of the Fair Field with Rev Richard Priestley who acts on behalf of *Binegar Parochial Church Council* (BPCC).

Rev Priestley says the Diocese accepts that it cannot develop the land. It is looking at other options.

BPCC has a long-standing wish for off-street parking for Church events to avoid congestion on Station Road. This has Parish Council support. At present, there is an informal agreement to use the part of the field between Churchyard and school. This is not a good arrangement and pedestrian access to the Church is along a dangerous section of Station Road.

Parochial Church Council options

1 Acquire a car park area

BPCC has asked for a strip of the Fair Field for car parking along the boundary with the Cemetery and Churchyard. Rev Priestley notes that, longer-term, this would offer land for Cemetery expansion.

The Diocese seems willing to consider this proposal. In it, BPCC acquires some form of ownership to that strip of the field. The Diocese would look for an alternative use for the rest of the field (for example, to fence off the car parking and let the rest for grazing). This could bring the Diocese a small income and relieve it of maintenance responsibility.

2 Acquire the whole Fair Field

BPCC wants the Diocese to consider another option, local ownership of the entire field. In this option, BPCC again acquires some form of ownership of the whole field (maybe a long lease).

For this to happen, the Diocese requires a plan of what community use will be made of the field.

3 Do nothing

Doing nothing means that the Diocese will let the whole field, possibly for grazing.

Issues

Doing nothing deprives the Church of car parking for large events. There are three weddings in 2016 and, on average, 5-6 funerals a year (10 in 2014). Mendip's protection of the open space continues but there are risks with remote ownership (the Diocese could sell the field or lease it to an unacceptable tenant).

To own the field, the Parish Council would have to buy it. It measures 2 acres. It is unlikely that the Parish Council would raise sufficient to outbid, say, an equestrian purchaser.

Option 1, car parking only with the rest of the field let for grazing is a possibility. It is messy, dividing the field, and entails the risks of remote ownership.

Option 2, where BPCC acquires the whole field, offers long-term protection of the asset. However, BPCC is not in a financial position to maintain it. For this option, therefore, BPCC seeks a local partnership. BPCC is approaching Binegar Parish Council with this in mind.

BPCC asks whether the Parish Council will help. Together, the Councils would need to work up a proposition for use of the Fair Field and put it to the Diocese. There will be costs to develop any use of the field, perhaps covered by grants or donations. There will be maintenance costs – grass cutting and boundaries, for example – that can only fall to the Parish Council.

[Next step](#)

Richard Priestley will join us on 1 March to start a discussion.

Richard Higgins
25 February 2016