



PLANNING ADVISORY AND HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Extraordinary Planning Advisory and Highways Committee held on Wednesday 17th December 2025 in the Public Hall.

In light of the large number of public present the Chairman stated that the first 30 minutes would be set aside for public participation and he asked that each speaker limit their question to 3 minutes each.

Six members of the public had previously expressed an interest in addressing the Committee and the Chairman permitted them to speak first, each speaker expressed their concerns with regard to the planning applications to be considered.

In all, seven residents spoke on a range of issues. These included issues related to the house being partially repaired not restored; the lack of real public benefit at the cost of much public harm; environmental, wildlife and biodiversity degradation; permanent damage to historic landscape; loss of meadow; well documented and recent presence of otters; flood risks & water pollution; scale of enabling development; lack of CIL & affordable housing; strength of bridge and St Mary Well St access issues; urban-style density; inappropriate housing; reliability of the proposals. No members of the public spoke in favour of the application.

The Chairman then invited any further comments, during this time opinions were expressed in the strongest terms.

The Chairman invited the applicant or his representatives to address the concerns expressed. The applicant's senior projects manager, architect and heritage adviser each described aspects of the proposals and the reasons for them. There was vocal reaction, from among those attending, to some of their descriptions and reasons.

2356 MEMBERS PRESENT: Cllr Gillings (Chairman), Cllr Anderton, Cllr Benton, Cllr Corbett, Cllr Dawkins, Cllr Gunning and Cllr Watts; also Christine Bright (Town Clerk) and approx. 160 members of the public including the applicant, Mr Perkins and his consultants.

2357 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Biggs.

2358 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

(a) To **CONSIDER** the following **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**:

Prior to considering the applications the Chairman read a briefing paper (copy attached) however there was increasing disquiet at some of its content culminating in a disruption to the meeting, including a walkout by some residents. The Chairman reminded the meeting that it was a Council Committee meeting and the public should allow the Council to continue with their official business.

After concluding the paper, there was a brief discussion by members.

1. **P/FUL/2025/06865**

SITE OF PARNHAM HOUSE, PARNHAM

Conservation and restoration works to the fire damaged South Wing of Parnham House including reinstatement of the roof, floors and walls, and refurbishment.

Enabling development to fund the overall conservation and restoration works at Parnham House (as a private home with a hospitality offering), involving the erection of 82 dwellings and two visitor accommodation lodges, together with the provision of associated infrastructure including bridge crossing of the River Brit, leisure facilities, surface water drainage features, landscape and biodiversity works, alteration to existing vehicular access and diversion of existing right of way.

The Chairman asked members whether there was a proposal to approve the application, with no proposer or seconder he then asked whether there was a proposal to refuse the application. Cllr Dawkins expressed his objection to the bridging of the River Brit and development of Mill Ground and proposed to recommend refusal, supported by Cllr Corbett. But it was noted that conditions could not be added to recommendations to Dorset Council.

The Chairman reframed the motion as To Recommend to Refuse the Application, proposed by Cllr Dawkins and seconded by Cllr Corbett, which was carried 4 votes in favour, none against and three abstentions.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND REFUSAL.

2. **P/LBC/2025/07037**

SITE OF PARNHAM HOUSE, PARNHAM

Conservation and restoration works to the fire damaged South Wing of Parnham House including reinstatement of the roof, floors and walls, and refurbishment.

Enabling development to fund the overall conservation and restoration works at Parnham House (as a private home with a hospitality offering), involving the erection of 82 dwellings and two visitor accommodation lodges, together with the provision of associated infrastructure including bridge crossing of the River Brit, leisure facilities, surface water drainage features, landscape and biodiversity works, alteration to existing vehicular access and diversion of existing right of way.

It was **AGREED** the decision also applied to this associated application.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND REFUSAL**.

2360 THE MEETING

The meeting which began at 7.00pm was concluded at 8.20pm

Chairman
3rd March 2026

Councillor Gillings (Planning Committee Chair) Briefing – December 2025

Parham House is a grade 1 listed building. Although severely damaged by fire in 2017, Parham House remains a grade 1 listed building, albeit now on Historic England's At-Risk register.

As is the case with Parham House if a Grade I listed building burns down, there is a strong legal and planning requirement to reinstate. For Historic England reinstatement **is always the default goal with the** primary aim being to restore the building to its former listed state. Demolition is only considered as a last resort.

To be demolished the building would have to be de-listed. To be de-listed the building would have to be so severely damaged that it no longer meets the criteria for listing. Only the Secretary of State has the power to de-list a property and the Secretary of State is advised by Historic England. According to Historic England de-listing is a rare outcome.

Whether this work is referred to as conservation, restoration, reinstatement or rebuild is an irrelevance as the only arbiter is Historic England and as is clear from the work done in preparing this application that Historic England are not considering demolition or de-listing.

Historic England can and does pursue owners to carry out the necessary works to safeguard the house as the owner has a general responsibility to preserve the structure. This has been the case at Parnham and the first phase of work has been completed. Full reinstatement cannot be **legally enforced** if the damage was an accident (like a fire) and not caused by a new owner. In this case the local planning authority and Historic England will assess the damage and decide what level of repair or reinstatement is appropriate, focusing on preserving the special interest of the building. This is the situation that this application indicates has been reached and in short, the building will be made water-tight, halting further deterioration and considerably reducing future maintenance costs.

The new owner has demonstrated the cost of restoration is far greater than the value of the restored building and as such consideration of an enabling development is justified. The owner has also demonstrated that the alternatives be that asset transfer, grant funding or alternative uses are not viable. Evidence to this effect has been provided.

Enabling development is born out of case law from the late 1980s (permission for an office block was granted to fund improvements to the Royal Opera house) and this has been incorporated into subsequent legislation and Historic England's statements and good practice advice. The concept of enabling development is quite exceptional as it allows what would not be in compliance with local and/or national planning policies, and not normally be given planning permission, except for the fact that it would secure the future conservation of a heritage asset.

Anyone can apply if they have a heritage asset that needs money to survive, and they have found a way to build something else, nearby, that pays for it, but that something else wouldn't normally get permission.

Simple enough in principle but the bar to cross is very high.

So, we arrive at the enabling work itself. Building on the deer park to fund the restoration of the house. Here lies the dichotomy. The Deer Park provides the setting for house but without the house what is the Deer Park if not just another field.

The heart of the matter for the local planning authority is to assess whether the benefits of the proposed enabling development, which would otherwise conflict with planning policies but which would secure the future conservation of a heritage asset, outweigh the disbenefits of departing from those policies.

As Knight Frank reported whilst there was a deal of interest in the house from differing parties and business sectors most were deterred by the cost of renovation and uncertainty over what stance statutory authorities would take. All final bidders were hospitality based and all but one fell away because of uncertainty over planning outcomes and availability of finance.

After a period of doubt when this building could have been left to decay, there is now someone who has taken on that challenge and has a positive plan that will secure the future of this historic asset. It represents a complete solution for the house that allows English Heritage to remove it from the At-Risk register.

The development site occupies the northern part of the deer park but is considered to be far enough away from the house such that the impact of the development upon the house is minimised. The site as demonstrated by the visualisation plans is well screened and contained in comparison to other areas around the town.

The site provides a further 82 houses to the Local Plan that help Dorset fulfil its commitment.

There is the potential to improve biodiversity across the estate though it could be argued that it is starting from a very low base because despite appearances the survey paints a less favourable picture. I am sure there is more to be done to expand on this survey but improved management, enforced by a 30-year agreement would seem something worthy of consideration. However, construction will impact upon wildlife and it remains to be seen whether or not there are sufficient safeguards to mitigate this.

There are powerful economic advantages to consider.

The enabling development would represent a tremendous boost to the construction industry in Dorset that otherwise is facing a downturn. Providing around 115 jobs per annum for the 3-year construction period and creating a gross value added of around £10m per annum.

Once completed the existing business at Parnham will expand and create an additional 50 jobs on site and potentially another 15 off-site. Hospitality business generally spends more locally than other business and together with the enabling development the consultants have estimated the GVA, to Beaminster's economy could be around £3M per annum.

There is a lot of information included with this application. Many of the matters that did or could have given rise to concern have been addressed.

No construction traffic will access the site via St Mary Well Street.

No bridges over the Brit or public rights of way are lost, though one right of way is re-aligned.

Demand on infrastructure will inevitably increase because of the additional housing but according to recent information both schools have capacity, in fact the high school has to draw pupils from South Somerset because of lack numbers in Dorset

Waste water is dealt with on site so does not burden the town's system. Surface water is dealt with by rainwater harvesting, permeable hard-standings where ever possible and on-site attenuation ponds to ensure the flow into the river is no greater than that from the fields.

Highways conclude this is a sustainable location for development and there would be no severe impacts on the local roads network?

The new housing will be sustainable with high insulation qualities and low or zero carbon technologies including air source heat pumps, photovoltaic panels, mechanical ventilation with heat recovery.

It is true there is no affordable housing as inevitably that would require more housing to reach the conservation deficit and that would be contrary to the objective of enabling development – ie minimum necessary.

In the past the house and grounds have not been accessible to the public but what is currently offered and what is intended to be offered in the future will provide more opportunity to experience what Parnham has to offer.

Whatever your perception may be if you read the documents, you will see that the owner will be investing a far greater sum to complete the hospitality venue that is being received via the conservation deficit.

This is a planning application where the usual rules are suspended because it is an enabling development. It really comes down to whether one believes or not that the benefits are greater than this disbenefits.

But then perhaps we should all consider how history might judge any decision made.

Could it be Beaminster had the opportunity to safeguard the future of one of the most historically important houses in Dorset but chose not to.

Or did Beaminster preserve the special beauty and character of this countryside for future generations to enjoy.