

Dorset Local Access Forum – 12 June 2009

Dorset LAF – Public Rural Access from Poundbury

To Dorset Local Access Forum for Meeting 12th June,2009

I have prepared the attached briefing for consideration by the DLAF.

I would appreciate the opportunity to persuade the DLAF to adopt a view with respect to future development at Poundbury, such that proper rural access to the North West and South West of the development, via the existing underpasses of the A35 and A37, is provided before construction commences. Furthermore, that the DLAF supports the proposals for rural access contained in the Supplementary Planning Document (Poundbury Development Brief 2006) and is opposed to planning permission for phases 3 and 4 of the Development being granted unless the applications fully conform to the SPD in respect of the provision of public rural access.

If the DLAF takes this view, I shall further seek to have the DLAF communicate the adoption of this view to the interested parties including the Duchy of Cornwall, West Dorset District Council, Dorset County Council, Dorchester Town Council and English Heritage.

Dave Green
Independent Local Access Forum member

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The Poundbury extension to West Dorchester began in 1994 and is projected to complete by around 2025 through four phases to provide some 2200 houses with a population of around 5000. At the moment with Phases 1&2 comprising about one third of the projected development, nearing completion, the population stands at around 1500 with 1000 working within the development (1). The planning applications for phases 3&4 are imminent and provide possibly the last opportunity for the public to influence the course of the development.

Present Rural Access from Poundbury

With the town of Dorchester to the East, Poundbury is bounded to the NW by the A37 Dorchester by-pass and to the SW by the A35 by-pass. Although there are underpasses under both these roads, the public are currently denied access to the surrounding country by these routes. The only public footpath S2/46 to the west crosses a new bank to the A35 where it joins footpath S57/6 to the Martinstown Road. It has been the subject of diversion and closure orders to facilitate the construction work. By virtue of the steep banks, the dangers of crossing the A35 and often poor quality of S57/6 following ploughing, this very limited access is not easily available to the majority of ordinary pedestrians and totally unsuitable for the disabled.

The 2006 Poundbury Development Brief

The Poundbury Development Brief (2) was adopted on 19 December 2006. It has the status of supplementary planning document (SPD), and will be used when decisions are taken on planning applications as part of the local development framework. An important feature of the SPD, is the importance accorded to rural access from Poundbury suggesting that the existing underpasses could be utilised to facilitate the access as shown below. These proposals were welcomed by almost every



interested party with the exception of the Duchy and their tenant farmer (3,4).

Proposed New Rural Access from Poundbury (Poundbury Development Brief 2006) showing incorporation of the existing by-pass underpasses and tracks into Public Rights of Way.

The Duchy's Current Position

In April, 2008 the Duchy of Cornwall undertook some pre-application (Phases 3&4) consultation comprising in part an exhibition. It became immediately apparent that the Duchy were not prepared to implement the recommendations of the SPD in respect of improved access under the A35 and that access under the A37 would not be made available for the 15 years or so it would take to complete phases 3&4. In a letter to the Ramblers dated 22 April 2009, Mr Conibear the Poundbury Development Manager made it quite clear that this remains the Duchy position and we may therefore expect that the Phase3&4 applications will not contain any provisions for improved pedestrian access to the west of the by-pass.

The Duchy's main arguments against providing access are centered upon the reservations expressed by their tenant at Maiden Castle Farm. Whilst it is self-evident that the tenant's interests may be damaged to some extent by the dedication of public rights of way (PROW) to and across the land he farms, this in itself is not sufficient justification to deny rural access to thousands of Dorchester residents. It may be that compensation for the tenant will be appropriate but this a secondary consideration. What is indisputable is that farming and public access are not totally incompatible. They continue hand in hand throughout Dorset and indeed Maiden Castle Farm already operates with several PROW's crossing and bordering the farmland and the tenant continues to graze sheep on Maiden Castle to which the public has long established access.

West Dorset District Council

The West Dorset District Council's position is given in a letter to the Ramblers dated 18 March 2009, in which they state:

'The Poundbury Development Brief was prepared by West Dorset District Council, to guide the next phases of development at Poundbury up to 2022. The document was adopted in December 2006 and as a Supplementary Planning Document is a material consideration when the council considers any planning applications within the area covered by the Brief. In this respect, any development proposal would be expected to accord with the provisions of the Brief and any variation will need to be justified by sound reasons in order to be considered acceptable.'

They go on to suggest that reservations over the Duchy's intentions as publicised at the Poundbury Exhibition (April 2008) should be brought to the Duchy's attention as soon as possible ' (to) give them the opportunity to consider the comments made before they proceed with the submission of the outline application for the next phases.'

Referenced Links

1. http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/content/documents/Poundbury%20media%20pack_2009.pdf
2. <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=349305>
3. http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media/pdf/o/8/Poundbury_May_consultation_feedback_SLJ_final.pdf
4. http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media/pdf/p/8/Poundbury_Development_Brief_Representation__Recommendations.pdf