

All Pain & No Gain for Beaminster

Objection to Planning Application — Parnham Estate (82 dwellings + lodges + enabling development)

Applicant Ref: P-FUL-2025-06865

From: Julia Hailes — Hooke, Dorset

Dear Dorset Council,

I wish to object to this planning application on the grounds that it causes disproportionate and irreversible harm to one of Dorset's most important historic landscapes, while offering almost no benefit to the wider community.

Below is a clear summary of the main concerns, followed by a brief acknowledgement of the positive aspects within the submission.

OBJECTIONS

1. No accessible summary - no clear explanation for the public

Although the applicant has submitted a vast number of technical documents, there is **no clear, consolidated, public-facing summary** explaining the proposal.

Local residents are expected to sift through hundreds of pages, dispersed visuals and complex appendices simply to understand what is being proposed.

For a development of this magnitude, transparency should be the starting point. Instead, the public is faced with opacity and an overwhelming volume of documents to decipher. It made me wonder if this lack of clarity was intentional.

2. No real examination of whether the development is necessary

The application provides no convincing explanation for why **82 houses on a Grade I landscape** are required to fund the restoration of Parnham House.

I challenge the assumption that full reconstruction is the only appropriate path. The ruin itself carries enormous **heritage, historical and human interest value**, including the unresolved mystery of the 2017 fire. Other conservation-led approaches - stabilisation, partial reconstruction, sensitive interpretation - **do not appear to have been explored**.

Restoring a historic house should not automatically entitle a landowner to build a new suburb around it.

3. No community benefit — only community loss

The scheme doesn't appear to offer any **meaningful gain** for Beaminster or its surrounding villages:

- no community facilities
- no improved access
- no cultural or heritage interpretation
- no environmental or wellbeing benefits
- no shared amenities or open spaces for local people

Yet the proposal asks the community to absorb the **cost**, landscape loss, access loss, ecological disruption, traffic and infrastructure pressures for what is ultimately **private gain**.

4. Public access will be worse — not better

The scheme proposes the **diversion** of one of the only public routes into the Deer Park: the footpath that crosses the stone bridge over the River Brit and continues toward Mapperton via W21/56 and W21/63.

This cherished route is the only way for local people to experience Parnham's historic landscape. The application offers **no guarantee** that:

- the bridge will remain open,
- the deer park will remain accessible, or
- any diverted path will match the experience, quality or setting of the existing route.

Given the benefits the landowner stands to receive, the restriction of the last thread of public access is deeply disappointing.

5. Wildness, nature and biodiversity at risk

While ecological reports have been submitted, they do not convincingly show how the development will:

- avoid fragmenting habitats
- protect deer, bats, otters, badgers and key bird species
- maintain tranquillity and dark skies
- prevent vehicle–wildlife conflict
- secure genuine, long-term biodiversity net gain

Parnham's Deer Park is part of a fragile ecological web linking Beaminster, Mapperton, Stoke Abbott and Hooke. Urbanisation on this scale **will** be harmful.

Historic deer parks are now rare — around **250–300 survive in the UK**, many only as fragments. Parnham's is unusually intact. Losing it to housing is an irreversible environmental and cultural loss.

6. Urbanisation of a rural townscape

The applicant's own visuals show:

- a **continuous, elevated frontage** of houses across the Park
- tight groupings and repeated forms
- consistent rooflines and massing (even with multiple house types)
- the creation of a **new suburban skyline**

This is not landscape-led design. It reads as a suburban estate placed abruptly into a pastoral, historic landscape.

It sits in jarring contrast to Beaminster's modest scale, charm and organic growth. Once the Park is urbanised, it can never be reclaimed.

7. Weak sustainability and environmental performance

Despite the presence of a "Sustainability Statement," the scheme offers **no clear commitments** on heat pumps, solar PV, insulation levels, water efficiency, sustainable drainage, waste, sewage systems, embodied carbon, local or recycled materials

In 2025, this is unacceptable. If such a development were ever justified (which I do not accept), it should at least be **best-in-class low carbon**. Nothing I have found in the documents provides that reassurance.

8. Pressure on Beaminster's infrastructure

Beaminster already faces:

- peak-time congestion
- insufficient parking
- GP capacity challenges
- limited school places
- constrained rural junctions
- known pressures on sewerage and wastewater systems

The Transport Assessment may model flows on paper, but it does not reflect the lived reality.

Eighty-two homes - plus estate traffic, hospitality guests and deliveries - will bring significant cumulative impact.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE POSITIVE ELEMENTS

I recognise that many of the architectural drawings show **better-quality design** than I expected. The house elevations and materials are, individually, quite attractive.

However, houses in the wrong location still cause unacceptable harm.

Even the applicant's own visualisations demonstrate that the new dwellings:

- dominate and interrupt long-established views
- erase the character of the Deer Park
- introduce a suburban skyline into pastoral landscape
- permanently urbanise one of Dorset's most important settings

High-quality detailing cannot compensate for the loss of an irreplaceable historic parkland.

A Better Future for Parnham — and for Beaminster

Parnham could instead become something remarkable:

- a place where the fire-damaged house is **preserved in part as ruin**, a testament to its story
- a landscape of **wilding, restoration and ecological recovery**
- a site offering **community access, walking routes and interpretation**
- low-impact, nature-connected development such as eco-lodges or arts/heritage uses
- a space for **learning, creativity and wellbeing**
- a model of sensitive conservation rather than large-scale urbanisation

The current proposal offers none of this. It sacrifices the landscape for private development and labels it “enabling.” True enabling development should **benefit the public**, not simply the owners.

Conclusion

Parnham is one of Dorset's crown jewels. Its Deer Park, historic setting and unique atmosphere make it irreplaceable.

This proposal would cause lasting harm to:

- ✓ heritage
- ✓ ecology
- ✓ landscape
- ✓ public access
- ✓ community wellbeing
- ✓ the identity of Beaminster

The restoration of Parnham House - in whole or in part - should be possible **without destroying the landscape that gives it meaning**, and with a vision that contributes positively to the community and environment.

I cannot support this application.

Yours sincerely,
Julia Hailes
Hooke, Dorset