

## **Amesbury Town Council**

### **Country Park Use Policy**

**V1.0 August 2022**

#### **Background**

The Country Park refers to the area of land transferred by Bloor Homes to Amesbury Town Council as part of their S106 agreement. The scope of this policy relates only to the area of land defined in the S106 agreement as 'The Country Park' and does not apply to other land, including those which adjoin the area defined.

Most country parks are managed by local authorities, although other organisations and private individuals can also run them. The area defined as 'The Country Park' is owned and managed by Amesbury Town Council. The 1968 Countryside Act empowered the Countryside Commission to recognize country parks. Although the Act established country parks and gave guidance on the core facilities and service they should provide it did not empower the designation of sites as country parks, as it was left to local authorities to decide whether to endorse a site calling itself a country park. Amesbury Town Council has resolved to endorse the area of land specified as a Country Park.

The purpose of a country park is "to provide a place that has natural, rural atmosphere for visitors who do not necessarily want to go out into the wider countryside". Visitors can enjoy a public open space with an informal atmosphere, as opposed to a formal park as might be found in an urban area. For this reason, country parks are usually found close to or on the edge of built-up-areas and rarely in the wider countryside, as is the case with Amesbury Country Park.

#### **Accreditation**

Natural England defines a country park as "areas for people to visit and enjoy recreation in a countryside environment". Natural England is responsible for the formal accreditation of Country Parks.

In order obtain accreditation Country Parks must meet criteria, which includes 'essential' criteria and 'desirable' criteria\*.

'Essential' criteria includes:

- *available for public or educational visits*
- *near public toilets – either on-site or a 2-minute walk away*

In its present form the country park would not meet all the 'essential' criteria to qualify as an accredited country park, but the guidance gives information on the standards the Town Council could be working towards to meet formal accreditation standards.

#### **Consultation & Considerations**

Amesbury Town Council has undertaken a number of enquiries as to the appropriate and proposed use of the Country Park. This included consulting with the following:

1. Obtaining advise RE the S106 agreement concerning the transfer of land from Bloor Homes to Amesbury Town Council
2. Wiltshire Council Archaeology
3. Natural England
4. .GOV reference material
5. Bloor Homes
6. Activities held on and uses of other country parks, including accredited parks

From consultation it has been determined that:

- The S106 agreement for the country park specifies it as an amenity area
- The S106 agreement specifies that the Town Council must not use or allow perpetuity
- That the site is not a designated nature area
- That no evidence of rare or protected species of wildlife or fauna has been found on the site and that factors should not be considerations in determining use of the space
- That areas of the site contain sensitive archaeology and therefore advice should be taken before disturbing any ground on site
- That the use of Country Parks for 'public events' is encouraged and that this is one of the 'essential' 'criteria\*' required by Natural England to gain formal accreditation as a country park
- Many country parks organise entertainment for visitors, and are venues for fireworks displays, shows and fairs and other large, outdoor events and that therefore such activities fall within the scope of "use as a country park in perpetuity"

In a meeting during June 2022 councillors

- agreed that the Country Park was an amenity area for use of the community.
- discussed Natural England advice and recognized definitions of country parks.
- discussed the lack of amenity space, that is under the Town Councils control, to hold community type events.
- noted that concerns were raised by residents about the impact of noise and traffic (parking issues), in the potential use of the park for events.
- noted that use of the park for activities or events must be balanced with public benefit and minimizing disruption to residents.

As a result of consultation and discussion, the council has agreed to a criteria of 'points of consideration' which should be considered when a proposal is made for use if the country park, this has lead to the creation of this policy.

### **Policy**

In consideration of the above, the Council agrees to govern the use of The Country Park as follows:

Amesbury Town Council may, through a resolution by full council, resolve to hold (or allow to be held) events or activities at the country park, having referenced (and addressed so far as reasonably possible) all the points of consideration specified in this document.

It is recognized that the points of consideration do not constitute a full requirements list, nor may it always be possible (by nature of some events) to fully mitigate these, but that overall, they will all be addressed 'so far as is as reasonably possible'.

The exception to use of the park requiring full council approval only exists where the council's Town Clerk and Events Officer both agree to use by an organisation, where the activity is for community benefit, and where the officers are satisfied that:

- The activities concerned do not result in excessive noise such as the use of amplified equipment, large generators, or regular vehicle movements etc.
- That the timings of such activities are between 8am and 7pm.
- That suitable risk assessments have been carried out.
- That suitable insurances and licenses are in place for the activity
- And where all points of consideration specified in this document have been addressed.

### **Points of consideration**

In considering requests for use of the park, the Town Council will, so far as is reasonably possible, appraise the following points of consideration.

- The Community benefit or demand for activity, must (in the council's opinion) outweigh the inconvenience or disruption potentially caused by nearby residents, which will always be minimized so far as is reasonably practicable.
- That no alternative site, under the control of the town council, exists which is more suited to the intended activity.
- That the proposed location of the proposed activity on the Country Park itself is the best location, so far as is practical, to minimise noise and disruption whilst still being suited to the proposed activity.
- That measures will be put in place to manage disruption and noise, so far as is reasonably possible.
- That issues relating to traffic and parking are considered and managed – by way of either (or a combination of) marshalling, temporary restrictions, alternative parking areas and/or substantial pre-event communications.
- That the activity does not cause any disturbance to potential archaeology, or that professional advice is sought or, mitigation put in place, where this risk exists.
- That consideration is given to the preceding frequency of events held at the park and that overall events at the site should be limited to a maximum of 5 times a year, except in exceptional circumstances and by further resolution.
- That sufficient communication of planned events is undertaken with residents – which may be undertaken by way of public notices, social media, Town Council website and newsletter (where sufficient time exists). The amount of communication required will be dependent on the size of the event and be specified during the decision-making process.

### **References**

- \*<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-ccreditation-for-your-country-park>