

## Moretonhampstead's Special Qualities

# Statement in response to the Parish Housing Report, 2017

### Synopsis

The parish council began a process in November 2016 to identify sites that could be developed for local housing. Ten green-field locations were considered and a report compiled following a public consultation. On 7 March 2017 the parish council agreed to accept the report and to open discussions with the owners of the sites. At the same time the council also resolved 'to consider providing an alternative site or sites for public allotments and utilise the existing allotment site for development'.

In response to the large number of sites put forward, and the sensitivity of many of them, this statement was drawn up and considered by the steering group of the 'special qualities' network from 8-15 September 2017. All eleven sites identified in the parish council discussions were considered in respect of their special qualities, and graded according to whether they were 'Valued', 'Highly Valued', 'Very Highly Valued' or likely to arouse no more than neutral feelings amongst local residents. While it goes without saying that all such gradings and the evaluations of their merits are subjective, and certainly not everyone will agree with every grade of value, it is felt that such a system might help planners to see clearly which sites are likely to cause the greatest loss of local amenity, and to understand the reasons for such a view.

Given the complicated, varied and extended natures of some of the sites, some of the sites were considered in parts and two were considered as one. Thus fifteen sites were graded in all, as follows:

Area A: Highly Valued	Area E: Valued
Area B: Very Highly Valued	Area Fi: Very Highly Valued
Area Ci: Valued	Area Fii: Very Highly Valued
Area Cii: Valued	Areas G and H: Very Highly Valued
Area Di: Very Highly Valued	Area Ii: Valued
Area Dii: Very Highly Valued	Area Iii: Highly Valued
Area Diii: Highly Valued / Very Highly Valued	Area J: Neutral
	The Allotments: Very Highly Valued

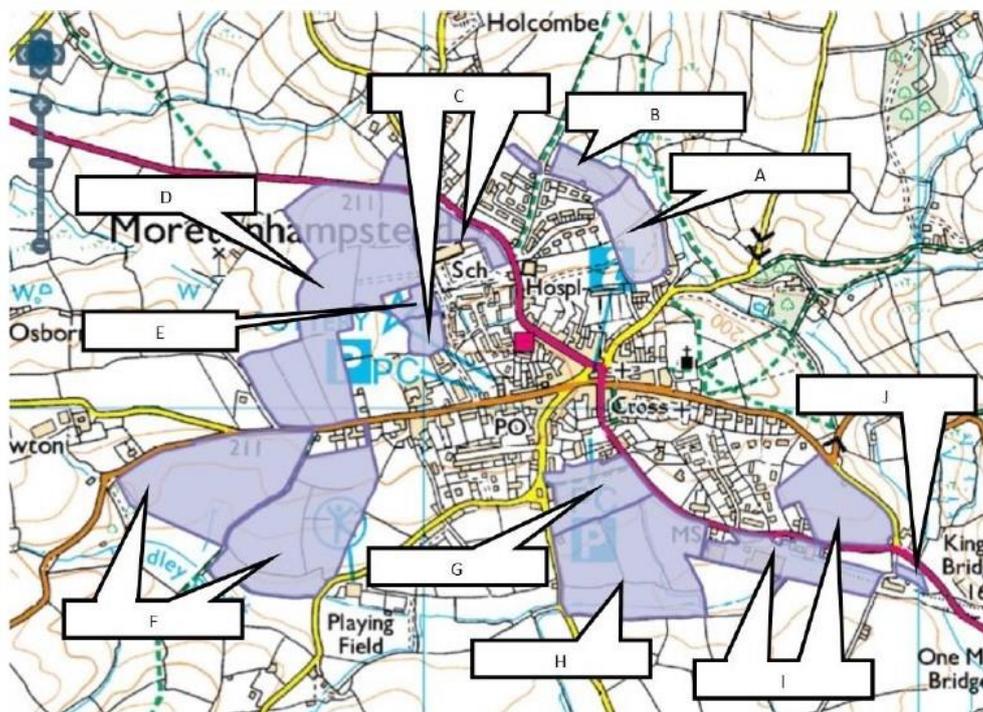
Details of the reasoning underpinning all these grades follows in the main body of the report.

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## Introduction

The parish council began a process in November 2016 to identify sites that could be developed for local housing. Ten green-field locations were considered, as shown on the map below. A public consultation was carried out as to the merits of all these sites in February 2017. An open day was held and a survey undertaken, which together elicited responses from 222 people, 191 of whom replied to the question as to whether they felt new housing was desirable or not. A report was accordingly compiled by consultants Lemon Gazelle. On 7 March 2017 the parish council agreed to accept the report and to send a copy 'to the owners of the sites listed in the study and invite them to meet with the Housing Working Group to discuss the possibility of working with the parish council on proposals for meeting housing needs.' At the same time the council also resolved 'to consider providing an alternative site or sites for public allotments and utilise the existing allotment site for development'.



Each of the areas discussed in the report is considered below and rated according to the degree to which it is valued by members of the community. Four categories are used: 'very highly valued', 'highly valued', 'valued' and 'neutral'. While it goes without saying that all such gradings and the evaluations of their merit are subjective, and not everyone will agree with every grade of value, it is felt that such a system might help planners to see which sites are likely to cause the greatest loss of local amenity, and to understand the reasons for such a view.

**Please note that the following points are not a full consideration of the issues arising from these sites but only of their special qualities to the people of Moretonhampstead.**

Area A: ‘Off end of Embleford Crescent’ [field adjacent to the allotments, to the north of Kinsmansdale]

Highly Valued

This field is concealed from the path to the north in summer by a line of trees. However, it is much loved by those who know it, especially local residents in Kinsmansdale. In addition it is highly visible from the public footpaths across the Sentry and down to Lime Street, and is part of the ‘green wall’ to the north of the town. It is thus an important part of the green ‘natural capital’ of Moreton and its immediate hinterland. Development of this land for houses would undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the town and remove a much-loved view from the locality, contrary to the purposes of the national park.



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Area B: DNP14/121 - Land at the end of Queen’s Road

Very Highly Valued

This steeply sloping field provides a natural boundary to the built-up area of Moretonhampstead. It acts as a green wall, which provides a well-laid out boundary to the settlement. As such it is an important part of the green ‘natural capital’ of the town and its immediate hinterland. To breach it with a development for housing would be to ruin a beautiful field and create a ragged edge to the development, entailing a sense of sprawl. It would detract from the setting of the line of bungalows at the top of the hill, which have clearly been designed to be low-rising but to take advantage of the view up the valley. In addition, this area is frequented by many walkers and local people who greatly appreciate the natural amenity offered by this attractive and characterful field.

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Area C: DNP14/095 – Land at Chagford Cross and Bradford Meadow (the small field adjacent to the Betton Way roundabout).

Site C is two distinct areas of land separate from each other but in the same ownership. The first is at Chagford Cross, identified on the Local Plan as ‘MOR1’: this has already been allocated for housing development by DNPA. The other lies next to the mini-roundabout on Betton Way.

*i. Land at Chagford Cross*

Valued

This parcel of land sits to the east of Betton Way, to the south of the road to Chagford, and to the north of the school. As the following photograph shows, it sinks down from Chagford Cross and thus is not immediately obvious to visitors, whose attention is drawn to the magnificent views towards the moor, in the opposite direction. Although it has value in that it is a green field and thus constitutes part of the locality’s natural capital, it could accommodate well-designed houses without great loss to the amenity of the locality. Significantly, it has already been allocated for future housing development by DNPA: it has therefore already been considered at a public hearing and no over-riding objections were presented to the inspector that should cause the land not to be developed for housing. Having said that, it needs to be stressed that poorly laid out development here will have a negative effect on the initial impact the visitor coming from the north. It is also possible that close-siting of houses here will have a negative impact on properties on the other side of the road that currently enjoy a view towards the moor. Any development should thus take place with extreme sensitivity to the potential damage that could be done by dense and/or high housing.



*Land at Chagford Cross*

*ii. Bradford Meadow*

Valued

The other area included in Site C lays beside the mini roundabout on Betton Way, adjacent to the development at Sawyer’s Walk. Its principal value to the community is natural capital, in that

it is an unspoilt green field. Some people have voiced the opinion that it would be the ideal location for a frequently discussed third car park in Moreton. Either way, the low level of the site means that its development will not have a far-reaching visual impact.



*Bradford Meadow*

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Area D: DNP08/019 – Land to the west of Betton Way, south of Langhill and north of Court Street

This is a very large amount of land sweeping almost all the way around the west side of the town. It is therefore necessary to consider it in several sections, starting in the north.

*i. Field to the north of the road to Chagford, adjacent to the roundabout*

Very Highly Valued

This small field marks an attractive and welcome introduction to the countryside for anyone walking north out of Moreton, with an ancient and characterful twist in the lane and hedgerow that immediately introduces the walker to the character of Dartmoor. As such it is an important part of the green ‘natural capital’ of the town and its immediate hinterland, which enhances its rural character as a moorland town and desirability as a destination for holidaymakers. To develop it would be to suburbanise this part of the town’s fringe and create a sense of sprawl beyond the well-defined town boundary. It would also be highly detrimental to the amenity of the neighbours.



*Field to the north of Chagford Cross*

*ii. Area of high ground to the south of the road to Chagford, adjacent to Chagford Cross*

Very Highly Valued

The view towards the high moor formed by the creation of the roundabout at Chagford Cross is one of the most striking in the vicinity and helps to cement Moretonhampstead's reputation as the 'Gateway to the Moor'. It would therefore be a highly significant loss if it were to be developed for housing, obscuring this precious view all the way to Cosdon and Haytor. It is however, the view that is so special, not so much the field itself. While its use as a playground or picnic area would not necessarily spoil this special quality; its development for housing or business land most certainly would. In addition, houses here would be visible from the places on the high moor mentioned above. It is thus of great value not just to Moretonians but to the whole of the north of the park.



*Land at Chagford Cross, looking towards the high moor*

*iii. Area of lower ground to the west of Betton Way*

Very Highly Valued

Highly Valued

The rest of Area D includes a wide sweep of land around the west side of the town, reaching down to the north side of Court Street. The land is highly visible when looking down on the town from Sutton Hill and especially from the public footpath across it. As such it is an important part of the green ‘natural capital’ of the town and its immediate hinterland, which enhances its rural character as a moorland town and desirability as a destination for holidaymakers. This view also reveals the historic boundaries of the medieval town, showing how they trace the contours of the land. The green fields here thus represent everything that the national park stands for, in terms of historic character and natural beauty, with outstanding views towards the moor. Much of this land is thus Very Highly Valued.



*Area D, viewed from  
the footpath from  
Sutton Hill to  
Bowdon Farm*

Some development of individual houses has already taken place along the northern edge of Court Street. It is possible that this could be added to without great loss to the amenity of the town. It would not be easy, however: the part that has *not* been built on retains some distinctive long field shapes. These are ancient: they appear in their present on the 1790 survey as well as the 1840 tithe map, and thus are legally protected. Another problem is that high-density housing of the sort needed to provide low-cost housing for local people would be totally out of keeping with the existing few detached properties here. Nevertheless, it is considered that the undeveloped land here is Highly Valued in its current state.

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Area E: DNP[14?]/094 – Field to the west of Betton Way

Valued

This green field site is well shielded by trees and on relatively low ground. The principal loss from its development for housing would be the destruction of a greenfield site. The same

comments thus apply as were made in connection with the southern part of Site C, to which it is adjacent.

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Area F: DNP10 – 063 – Two fields on the road to Moorgate, at Cherry Tree and to the north of North Bovey Road

*i. Field at Cherry Tree*

Very Highly Valued

This is one of the most attractive fields in the whole area, proving a stunning vista of the moor as one leaves Moretonhampstead on the moorland road and thus helping to cement Moreton's reputation as the 'Gateway to the Moor'. At the same time, it provides an attractive setting to those approaching Moreton, before they drive or walk through the trees and emerge at the top of Court Street. As such it is an important part of the green 'natural capital' of the town and its immediate hinterland, which enhances its rural character and desirability as a destination for holidaymakers.



*Land at Cherry Tree, looking down over the fields once known as Market Closes*

According to the 1790 survey, it was historically many small fields, including 'Market Closes', which suggests an association with local economic history. Development of any of this large field would undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the town and remove a much-loved view from the locality, contrary to the purposes of the national park.

ii. Field to the north of North Bovey Road

Very Highly Valued

This is a particularly attractive undulating field accessed off the bend in North Bovey Road. It was originally many small closes of land, including 'Sweethearts Meadow'. It is very visible when

approaching Moreton from North Bovey: it is right in the sightline coming down the hill. As such it is an important part of the green ‘natural capital’ of the town and its immediate hinterland, which enhances the rural character of the area and its desirability as a destination for holidaymakers. This is especially the case in view of the number of visitors coming to the playing fields for recreation and for camping in the summer months.



*Field to the north of North Bovey Road, which once was known as Sweethearts Meadow*

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Area G: DNP08/018 – ‘Courtenay Park’, and Area H: DNP14/102 – Land off Brinning Lane and Station Road (fields below Courtenay Park, between North Bovey Road and the A382)

Very Highly Valued

It is not known when this field started being called Courtenay Park. Presumably the name was changed in honour of the Courtenay family of Powderham, who were lords of the manor for more than half a millennium. Perhaps it was at the same time as the construction of nearby Courtenay Terrace. Either way, the historic name for it is Heale or Hale. Area G (originally known as Pound Meadow) is part of a holding called Inner Heale, which was granted to John Soper in 1608 and subsequently held by the Nowsorthy, Hill, Varder and Heyward families, among others. Area H is the three fields known historically as Heale Ground (called ‘first field’, ‘second field’ and ‘third field’), together with Heale Meadow (the field through which Wadley Brook runs). The field boundaries of Area H are ancient: they appear in their present arrangement on the 1790 survey as well as the 1840 tithe map, and thus are legally protected.



*Pound Meadow, Heale Ground and Inner Heale Meadow (Areas G and H), as they appear on the late-18<sup>th</sup>-century survey of the manor*

These five fields together make up a particularly attractive undulating landscape which greets those approaching Moretonhampstead along the A382 from Bovey Tracey. They create a green edge to the town, preserving the sightlines to Dartmoor that are all-important in reminding local people and visitors of the town's relationship to the higher land, and cementing its reputation as the 'gateway to the moor'. In addition, for those leaving the town this way, they are an immediate and powerful reminder of the closeness of the town to its rural surroundings. As such they are an important part of the green 'natural capital' of the town.



*Pound Meadow and Heale Ground from the A382, as one approaches the town from the south*

The path across the middle of Area G is heavily used by pedestrians and dog walkers, who enjoy the stunning view down the Wray Valley. Also, the views across this land is especially enjoyed by the many houses around the perimeter.



*The view down the Wray Valley as currently enjoyed by local residents and visitors to the town*

On top of these valuable features, the fields act as a green break between the built-up area of Thompson's yard at the bottom of the hill and the town itself. Such large open areas within a town are hugely valuable in its rural town planning, for while the unadventurous planner sees infill as the easiest way to develop, he or she thereby ultimately creates a block of housing with no relief of green spaces. The planner who is bold enough to build at a distance, however, can create a far more natural and rewarding environment, in which houses around the perimeter gain the value of views across the meadows too, and existing houses do not lose their views and local residents do not lose the amenity value of the paths across the middle. There is a very great advantage to be had in the community seeking to obtain this land in trust to be preserved as an open space in perpetuity.



*Looking across Pound Meadow (aka Courtenay Park) from the edge of the town.*

For all these reasons, Courtenay Park/Inner Heale and Heale Ground is collectively one of the most cherished open spaces near Moretonhampstead. It is therefore not surprising that it has triggered two local campaigns: 'Moreton Really Matters' (<https://www.facebook.com/moretonreallymatters>) and a postal petition of the residents of Moreton organised by Clive Yallop in the hope of preventing the development of this land. The

latter resulted in the return of 231 written replies, which were sent to the Dartmoor National Park Authority in August 2017. That the proposal to develop this land should yield such an immediate reaction from a sizeable portion of the community says a great deal about how many local people see this land as special.

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Area I: DNP08/017 – Thompson’s Yard on the south of Station Road, and the field directly opposite on the north side of the road

This is two very distinct areas of land that only appear together on the consultation due to the single ownership. One is Thompson’s Yard, a brownfield site. The other is a prominent green-field site on the other side of the road. Therefore they are considered separately here.

*a. Thompson’s Yard*

Valued

Obviously Thompson’s Yard is valued as employment land by many people in Moretonhampstead, not just because of the presence of Thompson’s as a company but also as a place where future companies might base themselves and provide local employment. However, whether these constitute ‘special qualities’ is open to debate. It is rather supposed that the original nineteenth-century railway buildings and platform, and associated railway mementoes, are what is most valued about this site today. These constitute an important part of the heritage of the town, whose fortunes were considerably affected by the presence here of the railway from 1866 to the last freight journey in 1964.

One half of the site marked on the plan has already been allocated for future housing development (the other was considered unsuitable due to flood risk concerns). This has therefore already been considered at a public hearing and no over-riding objections were presented to the inspector that should cause the land not to be developed for housing.



*The part of Thompson’s Yard currently allocated for housing*

*b. hillside opposite Thompson's Yard*

Highly Valued

This prominent field on the north side of the A382 provides a pleasing backdrop to the Regency toll house at the junction of Station Road and the lane to the Sentry. It is thus an important part of the green 'natural capital' of the town and its immediate hinterland. Development of some or all of this land for a cluster of houses would undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the town and remove a much-loved view from the locality, contrary to the purposes of the national park.

While it might be possible to fit a handful of houses into the space to the north west of the old barn on top of the hill, out of sight of those approaching from the south, these will not sit well with the other houses in the area, which are substantial Victorian villas. Development here is therefore likely to create a disharmony of architectural styles, as well as a ragged fringe to the town.



*The field opposite Thompson's Yard, behind the Toll House, to the north side of the A382*

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Area J: DNP14/111 – Moretonhampstead Highway Depot (small industrial estate at Kingsbridge, known by some as the Gasworks)

Neutral

This is not an exposed site and indeed is one only viewed by people using the industrial units or passing nearby along the cycle path. The prime concern here is the loss of employment. Were this not to be an issue, there would be no impact on the special qualities of the town.

It needs to be said that even 'neutral' sites – which are not regarded as having a 'special quality' – nevertheless may have a socio-economic value. In this case, it is strongly felt that the current 100% use of the units demonstrates their economic value; if the units were to be pulled down for

housing, the loss of these jobs would be disastrous. However, this is planning matter, not a ‘special qualities’ one. If the associated jobs were to be relocated elsewhere within the community, there would be no overall loss.

#### Addendum: The Allotments

Very Highly Valued

There can be no arguing that all local residents would be extremely adversely affected by the building of houses on the allotments. The current allotments afford everyone who goes there a stunning view of the church from the north east, against the backdrop of Pepperdon and Hingston. Such a range of flowers and vegetables is grown that it would be many years of hard work before the soil of another site – presuming one could be obtained affordably – would look as attractive. Moreover, for those who are less physically fit, the proximity of the allotments to the town centre is very high valued in itself. In addition, many people in the town centre have no garden or, in the case of some new properties, very small gardens. Many people derive much of their food from the allotments – produced cheaply and sustainably with zero transport miles involved. The allotments are thus at the heart of the community and certainly one of the town’s special qualities in the eyes of everyone who has an allotment and tends it carefully and regularly, and everyone who walks there.



*The allotments*

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This statement is endorsed by the steering group, which is composed of: Poppy Burgess, Linda Collier, Bill Hardiman, Pam Mercer, Andy Moore, Ian Mortimer (co-ordinator) and Mike Warner.

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