



# The Odiham Society

## Odiham's Royal Deer Park – history, Conservation Area

### and self-guided walk

This paper has been produced to inform residents, and is written in response to the current owner's plan to build 12 substantial new houses (comprising 11 houses including a gatehouse, and a "parker's lodge" as his own residence). This is part of a project which would "restore" some 100 acres of the Deer Park closest to the High Street and Dunleys Hill. In mitigation he is offering to the community a small area for parking (maybe 20 cars), a community building, some hard surfacing, drainage works, tidying up the medieval fish ponds, introduction of some deer contained in a large fenced enclosure. Footpaths would be diverted around the deer enclosure and some low level power cables could be buried to the north of the site.



The extent and shape of the Royal Deer Park can be seen on the Godson map of 1739 above.

The average medieval deer park was about 100 acres. Odiham's at about 560 acres was large and the boundary was about 3 ½ miles long. Throughout its existence it has controlled the extent of Odiham to the south and of North Warnborough to the west. The boundary remains as a relict feature that can still be traced in the landscape. The undulating land ranges from 95m at the southern edge of just under 70m on the banks of the River Whitewater which drains eventually to the Thames. The southern part of the park is formed of Reading Beds consisting of mottled plastic clays and most of the land is covered by London Clay a stiff dark clay. These areas are heavy and difficult to plough. There are deposits of Valley Gravel and Alluvium along the Whitewater valley which were more fertile but liable to flooding.

Odiham was a royal manor from 1086 and Henry 1 spent Easter 1116 here at a residence probably near to the Bury. The first clear evidence of a royal park comes in 1130 when Hugh the Parker is mentioned, this comes at a time when many of the 150 royal parks were being created, only 5 of which were in Hampshire.

The park predated Odiham castle for in 1207 King John took 20 acres and a mill from Hugh the Parker. In many places the main residence is either close to the park or within it as at Clarendon but at Odiham it was built at some distance from it, presumably to take advantage of the defensive bend in the river Whitewater. However there was a parker's lodge, now the site of Lodge Farm, in the centre of the park. This was quite a modest 'working' lodge first mentioned in 1291, rebuilt in 1332/3. Part of the present building has been dendrochronology dated to 1368/9.

A deer park the size of Odiham's was a high status and expensive asset to maintain and its long history of 500 years can be explained as it was run by an institution, the crown, that had the resources to do so. The maintenance of the boundary ditch, bank and timber park pale to a height of 8 feet to keep the deer in was an onerous expense with many references in the royal accounts for example in June 1335 3 carpenters were employed for 8 ½ days repairing the park paling near Donnygeleye (Dunley's Hill).

Park management was a complex task. The park would have been subdivided into distinct areas to cater for different needs: launds (lawns/grazing). Coppice, wood pasture with mature trees and ponds.

Management of the deer was a primary function both for hunting in the Forest of Eversley and for food. In 1276 Edward 1 directed that an area of meadow should be enclosed to produce hay for winter feed for the deer. Over population of deer must have been an issue at this time for in the same year the king ordered 130 does to be taken to Kensington and Langley parks.

Timber was a valuable crop. It was used locally for building and repairing the castle and park pale and for heating. Larger timbers were also carried away; in 1440 timber was supplied for the building of Eton College. There were four fish ponds, still extant, which were used as keeping ponds for fish from the river and elsewhere. In 1262 Simon the Fisherman was sent to catch fish in the fishponds of Farnham Castle and bring them to Odiham.

Horses were kept in the park and in 1311 a royal stud was established to provide the king with fine horses. Considerable sums were spent on food and shelter for the colts and some was recouped by selling animals off. The last reference to a stud comes in 1360. Colt Hill is a reminder of this activity.

Although the Castle did not adjoin the park gardens were built within it as places to withdraw to. The first mention is in 1236/7. In 1293 Edward I remade the garden. In 1330 Edward III used 6 oaks to make boards to enclose an elaborate garden for his Queen Phillippa. This was remade in 1293 for Edward I.

Local people used the park for their own purposes, often illegally. In 1327 a woman, Ellen le Berebrayt, was pardoned for breaking into the park, hunting and taking away deer. In 1384 a man was accused of poaching fish and in 1390 two men were fined for keeping 22 pigs in the park.

The park continued to be maintained but the castle began to decay. In 1439/41 over £31 was spent on repairs but of this only £1 was on the castle. In 1531 Henry VIII with Anne Boleyn paid a short visit to enjoy a hunt but they stayed at the Lodge not the Castle. Elizabeth I stayed at Odiham on two of her Progresses. In 1591 she stayed at the Manor House on the site of Palace Gate as the guest of Edward More JP who later went on to found the alms-houses.

This was the last royal visit to Odiham, because James I, although he was fond of hunting, kept an extravagant court and had to sell £75000 of property. Odiham Park was sold to Lord Zouche and was tenanted by the Mapleton family as farm land. The last mention of a park was in 1669. It remained in the Zouche family possession until the male line failed in the 1730s and in 1742 it was sold to Paulet St John (later Mildmay) and it remained as an outlying part of that estate. It never became part of the landscape park at Dogmersfield. In 1920 the bulk of the estate was sold. The tenant farmers bought their own farms: Mr Thomas bought Palace Gate farm and Mr Parsons Lodge Farm. A small 32 acre holding, now Valentine's Farm, was sold separately. The park was crossed in 1797 by the Basingstoke Canal and in the twentieth century by the M3 and the Odiham by-pass.

The Deer Park has a 500 year history as a royal deer park and its key features such as the line of the pale, the park entrances and the fish ponds are rare examples of relict features in a landscape that remains, with the exception of Valentine Farm, unpeopled by later dwellings.

Sources:

- Labarge, M.W., A Baronial Household in the Thirteenth Century, 1965
- Liddiard, R, The Medieval Park, 2007
- MacGregor, P, Odiham Castle, 1983
- Mileson, S, Parks in Medieval England, 2009
- Millard, S, Odiham's Royal Deer Park, 2019
- Page, W, Victoria County History of Hampshire, Volume 4, 1911

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## **Conservation Area**

The history of the park has been recognised in planning policy by Hart District Council which has accorded it protection by means of its inclusion in the Odiham Conservation Area. Relevant extracts from the Conservation Area Appraisal and Proposals, documenting the historical significance of the Conservation Area, are shown below:

### **1.2 Summary of key characteristics and recommendations**

This **Character Appraisal** concludes that the key *positive* characteristics of the Odiham Conservation Area are:

- Location within an attractive landscaped area on undulating downland dropping down towards the valley of the river Whitewater;
- Survival of medieval Deer Park intact, cut by the Basingstoke Canal, on the northern edge;

The **Management Proposals** make the following Recommendations (summary):

#### General:

- Protect the landscape setting of Odiham;
- Protect views into and out of the town;
- Protect the conservation area from inappropriate new development;

#### **Character Area 1: The Basingstoke Canal and Old Deer Park**

##### Key positives:

- The medieval Deer Park survives almost intact apart from the Basingstoke canal, the farm and the bypass;
- Basingstoke Canal provides pleasant walks along the canal edge with views across and along the water;
- Groups of trees or low hedges create the field boundaries;
- Large, open fields towards Odiham, mainly used for sheep grazing;
- Surviving old quarries and former fish ponds;

- Only one building, on eastern edge of the park (Valentine Farm);
- The northern boundary of the park to the town is mainly defined by a very important brick wall which marks the end of the medieval burgage plots;
- Attractive landscaped area on undulating land dropping down towards the valley of the river Whitewater;
- Views into the rear gardens and of rooftops and trees, of the High Street properties from the park are very significant.

**Key negative characteristics/issues:**

- Brick boundary wall to Palace Gate Farm is not protected and in poor condition;
- Views into Odiham and threatened by potential developments in rear gardens;
- There has already been some loss of character due to new development being allowed very close to the northern boundary facing Deer Park.

## 9. Issues And Recommendations

### 9.1 Odiham and its setting

#### 9.1.1 The protection of the setting of Odiham

**Recommendation:**

- The District Council will continue to protect the setting of Odiham through the strict enforcement of policies contained within the Local Plan and will resist applications for change which would have a detrimental effect on the land adjoining, or on the edges of, the conservation area.

#### 9.1.2 Views into and out of the town

**Recommendation:**

- The District Council will protect the views into and out of Odiham, particularly the views shown on the Townscape Appraisal map. Proposals for new development which would impinge on these views will be resisted.

## A WALK ROUND THE “RESTORED” PARK

This walk describes how you can see the owner’s current proposals on the ground. All information is taken from the exhibition organised by the owner at The Old School in Odiham at the end of April.

You are advised to refer to a Footpath Map of Odiham Parish for the footpath numbers before setting out, as they are referred to in the text. Maps are available from the Odiham Parish Council office in the Bridewell, The Bury (01256 702716) or online at [www.odiham-society.org/walks.html](http://www.odiham-society.org/walks.html).

### The walk

Leave the George and walk north along the footpath: upon entering the park the most prominent new feature will be the Parker’s Lodge standing south of the stream on gently rising land. No details are available of the house but, since it is understood to be for the owner’s use, it will not be a small one.

Overhead cables on telegraph poles are visible but not prominent in the view, running east - west along the line of the stream behind it. The pylons and their cables to the east are prominent! Note the prominent white gable end of one of the houses just off Dunleys Hill.

Walking along the footpath to the west towards the original south gate (Palace Gate), the park metal rail fence and tree planting will follow the path line (“the gallops”) until turning north in line with the bottom of Dunleys Hill. “The gallops” will follow the same line in the opposite direction from west to east to the boundary with Valentine Farm and are intended to be for cycle as well as pedestrian use. Note to your left the tall gabled farmhouse of Palace Gate which was said to have been the viewing tower for the chase, and is believed to have been from where Anne Boleyn will have watched Henry VIII when hunting here. Pass a pit to your right from which sand was extracted and is now a small pond.

Continue towards the bottom of Dunleys Hill and the exit from the park along footpath 17 which leads to Hook Road in North Warnborough. The site of both the “gatehouse” and the entrance road from Dunleys Hill would be just to the left of the substantial oak tree, and will be very visible from the rear of the Odiham health centre.

The road will skirt the low lying pond adjacent to existing Dunleys Hill properties and lead through the current hedge line to the 11 proposed substantial new houses.

To the east of these houses will continue the large fenced area for the deer.

Tree planting, planting of orchards and the need to retain the deer will all mean that the current landscape will change from its open grazed fields, and views across the park will be restricted.

There is no current footpath access north from the exit to North Warnborough. A major diversion is proposed of footpath 18 to run parallel with Dunleys Hill and the new houses, alongside and outside the inner deer sanctuary. If you wish to view the area as nearly as is proposed, retrace your steps and take the footpath which crosses from the back of the George and leads diagonally across to the canal bridge en route for Lodge Farm (footpath 18). Cross the stream and turn left on the footpath (21) which runs along the hedge boundary to look back at Odiham and the site where the 11 houses are proposed to be.

Beyond the proposed new houses and the stream, the access road would become a private drive to the Parker's Lodge, giving an estimated length of hard surfaced road of approximately 1 mile, or half the width of the park.

The overhead cables, to be put underground, become more prominent at the line of the stream but they are almost certainly lower in height than the proposed houses.

Turn back and walk eastwards along the hedge (footpath 21) and past the junction with footpath 19 which comes straight from the back of the George. The proposal is to site the Parker's Lodge (understood to be intended as a house for the owner) adjacent to the current route of footpath 19, just south of the stream. Footpath 19 would be extinguished.

Under the proposals, walkers will walk to the east between two hedges some 2 metres high adjacent to the proposed Parker's Lodge and the fish ponds, though it would be lowered further on to allow a view back to the fish ponds to your right. It is proposed to divert footpath 20 (which currently runs from the top of London Road diagonally across the park) so that it would run straight across the park to the fishponds, and footpath 21 would continue, eventually rejoining "the Gallops" near Valentine Farm. The 3 fish ponds have historical significance as records exist of their use to store fish from Waverley Abbey for feeding the residents of King John's Castle.

As footpath 21 reaches the housing line along London Road, part of the original park pale, bund, ditch and the stumps of two large, now felled, oak trees are clearly visible along the north boundary with Angel Meadows.

### **Some changes from the present:**

- Reduction in open views across the land

- Many trees and deer fencing

- New houses at western edge and Parker's Lodge in centre

- Footpath routes altered and one extinguished

- Low power cables put underground

- Drainage works to reduce muddiness may be counteracted by the effect of paths narrowed by trees, fences and hedges

- Views across the park will alter with the tree planting and with the introduction of windows, roofs and cars, which may be particularly prominent glinting on sunny days.

### **Benefits:**

The owner believes his proposal will offer some benefits to the village

- A possible community building

- A space for events

- Some car parking

- A made up track, the Gallops, for pedestrian and cycle use along the southern edge of the park adjacent to the High St and London Road

- Improvements to the stream and ponds, if allowed by English Heritage and additional drainage