



The southern slopes of the University of Kent

Field campaigners lose battle to win village green status

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Campaigners have vowed to fight on despite losing a five-year battle to have the southern slopes of the University of Kent designated as a village green.

Kent County Council rejected the application after agreeing with the university that signs it erected years ago were adequate indication the land was only being used with its permission.

But Save the Chaucer Fields campaigners, who spent £30,000 on legal fees, say they will continue to try and protect the 43 acres of grassland from development so it can be continued to be enjoyed for leisure and recreation by local people.

Their efforts had been prompted by a proposal by the university to build a hotel and student accommodation on the land.

The decision against village green status was taken on Friday by the KCC's regulation member panel, which considered a report

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by officers, based on the findings of the inspector who conducted the public inquiry.

Although the inspector was satisfied the land had been widely used for recreation for 20 years, he also concluded the university did not do enough by erecting signs, which were in place long enough, to communicate to the public that use of the land was by revocable licence.

After the meeting, campaign chairman David Smith said: "Sadly, on this legal test the application has failed. We have given it our best shot and we have proved our case on two points.

"This is obviously a big disappointment, but there are a number of positives which we can take from the result.

"The village green application was just one of the routes by which we have been working to preserve the fields for future generations, and we have made real progress towards that goal.

"We hope the university authorities have listened and now accept that southern slopes of their campus are a very valuable green asset, not only for the local community, but also for themselves, their students and staff."

Mr Smith says it is reassuring that Canterbury City Council has designated the southern slopes as a green gap in its Local Plan, but admits the university will likely resist the proposal.

He said: "That has still to be tested when the Inspector continues with his examination of the Local Plan, but we hope the designation will be confirmed.

"The Save Chaucer Fields Campaign group remains resolute in its determination to preserve the fields for the enjoyment of all, and for future generations."

The university was asked for a comment but had not responded as the Gazette went to press.

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