

Village green bid puts build plan on hold

EXCLUSIVE

by **Gerry Warren**

gwarren@thekmgroup.co.uk

THE University of Kent has admitted its proposed plans to develop the Chaucer Field are being stalled by the objectors' village green application.

Deputy vice-chancellor for physical resources Prof Keith Mander was speaking to a meeting of staff and public on the campus after a poll of University and College Union members which revealed the majority were against the proposed location of the planned student blocks and hotel.

He said the university's financial backers were not comfortable to proceed while the village green application was undetermined and even hinted that it was looking at other potential development sites for the project.



University of Kent pro vice-chancellor Keith Mander

But Prof Mander also told the meeting that he would always favour the business case over the environment and claimed jobs could be threatened if the scheme did not go ahead.

Professor Richard Norman backed the views of local resi-

dents that the fields should be protected as unspoilt green space.

Another academic, Professor Chris Rootes, argued that it was not in the interests of the university to proceed with the development, given the uncertain and turbulent nature of the business.

But Prof Mander also received some support from the university's hospitality and commercial services staff.

They agreed with him that the university must be understood only as a business and objecting to the proposals put jobs at risk.

After the meeting the chairman of the Save the Chaucer Fields group, David Smith, said campaigners were "stunned" by the revelations which gave them encouragement.

He said: "We heard things which quite surprised us and it seems the weight of objec-

tion is having an affect, but we won't be taking our foot off the gas.

"It could be 2013 before the village green application is determined, particularly if it goes to a public inquiry. That is in the lap of Kent County Council.

"Although it is difficult to accurately interpret the university's position, there is definitely a sense that they are now looking at other options, even off campus.

"But we have put considerable effort into opposing the development of Chaucer Fields and won't stop now."

The Chaucer Fields Picnic Society held a picnic on the field at the weekend, and the progress of the campaign is being reported in a blog at www.chaucerfieldspicnicsociety.wordpress.com

The Save the Chaucer Field Campaign also has a Facebook page.