

'Green gap' bid faces a fight

Fields protection plea is 'concern' for university

Exclusive

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The University of Kent is refusing to be drawn on whether it will resurrect plans for a hotel and conference centre on meadows overlooking the city.

Documents lodged with the city council suggest the university could, in future, seek to develop on the area known as Chaucer Fields.

Campaigners have fought to have the grass slopes officially designated a village green and therefore protected from the bulldozers.

UKC initially proposed a 760-room student hall, a hotel and conference centre – but shelved the plans when a five-year legal battle unfolded.

As the Gazette reported last week, Kent County Council has ultimately sided with the university and rejected village green status for the fields.

UKC will only comment that it is "pleased the matter is now settled".

Since shelving its building



Campaigners have been hoping to save Chaucer Fields from development Picture: Chris Davey FM2215368

plans in 2012, it has built an 800-room hall of residence on a plot higher on the slopes next to its campus.

But Save the Chaucer Fields campaigners fear UKC could be eyeing up the Chaucer Field for development after all.

Campaign chairman David Smith told the Gazette: "They've since built their halls but they never did build the hotel and conference centre.

"It's plainly obvious that that land is worth far more to the university if it can be developed."

Documents submitted to Canterbury City Council as part of its consultation on its Local Plan may shed further light.

Within its draft plan, the council seeks to have the green meadows separating the UKC campus from the city suburbs designated a "green gap".

Its plan states: "The objective of

the green gap policy is to retain separate identities of existing settlements, by preventing their coalescence through development. Therefore, the Local Plan has proposed an extension to the green gap between Sturry and Broad Oak and two new green gaps between Canterbury and Bridge and UKC and Canterbury to ensure the countryside between these areas is protected."

'The land forms part of the future development plans of the university'

However, in an official response, UKC has objected strongly to the city council's plan.

Charles Moran, writing on behalf of UKC, states the draft Local Plan is not legally compliant.

He writes: "It is of great concern that ... the council decided to include a new designation relating to a significant area of the campus – 'green gap' designation at Chaucer Fields and the southern slopes – without any form of consultation and in the absence of any clear evidence base.

"The designation includes land which the council has known for some time forms part of the future development plans of the university."

Despite repeated requests, UKC declined to comment on any further plans it might have for the fields.

What do you think? Email kentishgazette@thekmgroup.co.uk or write to Gazette House, 5-8 Boorman Way, Wraik Hill, Whitstable, CT5 3SE.

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