



UNPOPULAR CHOICE: Chaucer Fields, the suggested site for a conference centre and student accommodation

Protesters fired up over plan for uni beauty spot

by Adam Williams
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THREE hundred lanterns lit up the Canterbury night sky on Friday in a protest against Kent University's plans to build a new conference centre and accommodation.

Chaucer Fields, which provides panoramic views from campus across the city, has been earmarked for a £60 million development including 800 student beds, a 150-room hotel and conference centre with 200 parking spaces. A planning application is expected to be submitted next month.

Friday night's lantern launching was the latest joint protest as more than 300 people gathered on Chaucer Fields despite the wet weather and muddy conditions.

Student Alex Murray, 20, helped put the event together and was overwhelmed by the response.

He said: "It was fantastic to see a huge turnout from both students and residents with all ages represented too.

"This issue is a huge opportunity for us to bridge the gap between students and residents, we each have our own petitions against the plans, but we will be meeting to co-ordinate our

strategy in the weeks ahead. The development is being led by the university, who want to bring a corporate element on to its campus, which could have an adverse effect on local businesses.

"On top of that is the fact it impinges on green belt land."

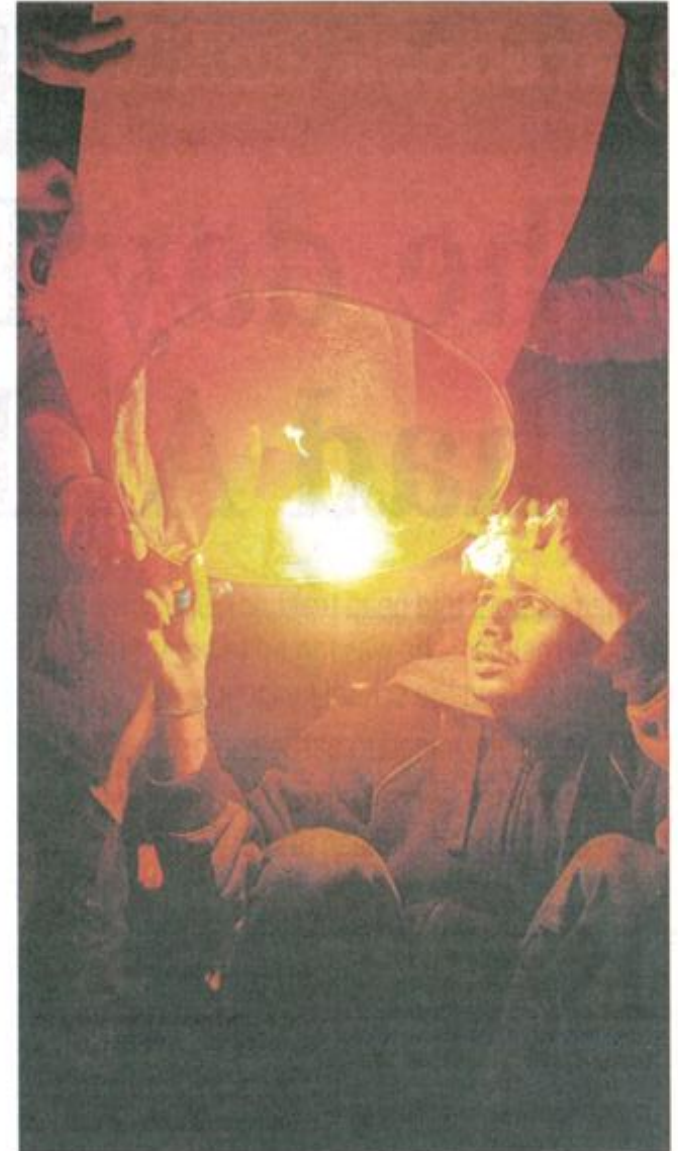
Those thoughts were echoed by Terry Westgate, chairman of the St Michael's Road residents association.

He added: "This campaign's gaining momentum with more and more residents associations and societies coming on board to express their concerns. Right across Canterbury, there's

people who are opposed to it.

"Chaucer Fields is an amenity that's been used and enjoyed by so many people for such a long time, long before the campus was even built. How people can expect it to remain like that with these proposed plans is beyond me."

■ See video footage of the lantern protest at www.kentishgazette.co.uk What do you think? Email kentishgazette@thekmgroup.co.uk or write to Gazette House, 5-8 Boorman Way, Estuary View Business Park, Whitstable, CT5 3SE



FIRED UP: Students protesting against the proposed development with the release of 300 Chinese lanterns, acoustic music, banners and singing

Picture: Barry Goodwin P01810247