

Old documents cast legal doubt over uni expansion

**WARNING:
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ELECTIONS
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by Gerry Warren
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DOCUMENTS dating back to the 1950s, which campaigners say could scupper plans for a development of student flats and a hotel at the University of Kent, have been unearthed.

Liberal Democrat activists working with residents have trawled through old files relating to the compulsory purchase of land for the campus development, which was decided by an inspector at a public inquiry.

They claim the documents reveal the inspector specifically stated that the land, now known as Chaucer Fields, should not be developed and should remain as a green buffer.

James Walker, a lawyer from the St Stephen's area of the city, said: "It is apparent from the report that the inspector only included Chaucer Fields in the CPO in order so it would act as a green buffer between the planned university and the city.

"His advice was unequivocal and the university were specifically told the campus site should



GREEN SPACE: Chaucer Fields, which protesters say is meant to be left undeveloped according to the terms of its sale

be separated from the city by open space. That open space is Chaucer Fields."

Architectural designer and fellow Lib Dem campaigner Nick Blake, who lives close to the threatened meadows, added: "CPO powers required that the land be used 'in the manner proposed by the plan', and that states on page eight that 'the southern part of the site be retained as open land and playing field'.

"Clearly the university have a

duty to abide by the legal conditions under which they were set up.

"To do anything else would be an obvious breach of their original permission.

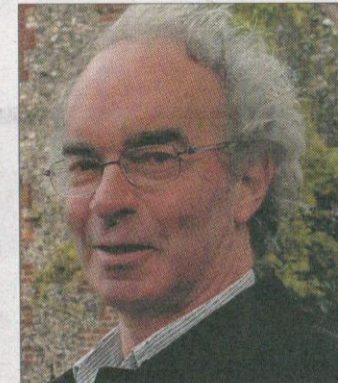
"We believe at the very least a further public inquiry would be needed if they want to overturn the original inspector's condition.

"We have written to the university and expect at the very least they must now put their existing application on hold."

The Save the Chaucer Fields Campaign group has also submitted an application to Kent County Council for the land to be legally designated as a village green, which, if approved, would prevent development.

The university's response has been to put up signs declaring the land as private property.

The planning application for the proposed Chaucer Fields development has now been submitted to Canterbury City Council.



PROTESTER: Nick Blake is demanding a public inquiry

The deadline for objections closed on April 25 but the plans can still be seen at www.canterbury.gov.uk. Search for reference numbers CA/11/00528 and CA/11/00531

The University of Kent did not want to comment when approached by this paper.

■ **What do you think? Write to Gazette House, 5-8 Boorman Way, Estuary View Business Park, Whitstable, CT5 3SE or email whitstablegazette@thekmgroupp.co.uk**