

# Campaigners take battle to save slopes to public inquiry

by Gerry Warren

gwarren@thekmgroup.co.uk  
@Gerry\_Warren

Residents campaigning to protect the southern slopes of the University of Kent from development will take their fight to a public inquiry this month.

The hearing at the Westgate Hall starts on February 23, when an application to register the Chaucer Fields as a village green will be heard.

The university previously revealed plans to build a hotel, conference centre and student accommodation on the site, but later deferred the scheme because of the controversy.

Instead it submitted plans for new student accommodation elsewhere on the campus.

The city council has already designated the Chaucer Fields in the Local Plan as a 'green gap' to provide a buffer between the university and residents' homes.

Kent County Council looked at the village green application and decided it should be considered by a government planning inspector.

A date for the inquiry had been set for March last year but had to be postponed for technical reasons after the university chal-



Chaucer Fields, Kent University

lenged new evidence the campaigners wanted to introduce.

The hearing, which could last up to 10 days, is the culmination of a long battle by the Save Chaucer Fields group, which has spent thousands of pounds trying to protect the land from development.

It claims to have evidence dating back to the 1960s of the fields' use for recreation, although it is expected that only information since 2001 will be admissible.

Chairman David Smith said: "After four long years of campaigning, we think that we have a strong case, but if we lose it won't be the end of the matter.

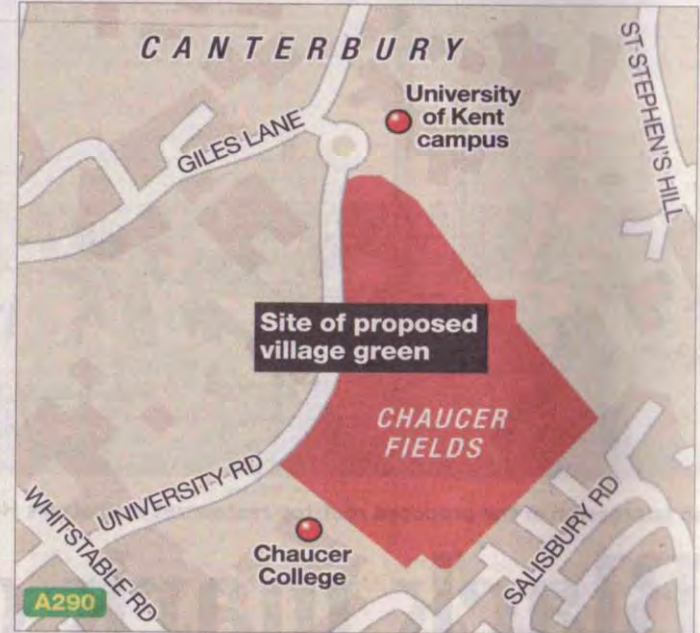
"Too much effort has been put in by a lot of people to accept defeat and walk away. We have learned a lot during this cam-

paign, and as a group we have always been prepared and ready to oppose any further proposals to develop on Chaucer Fields.

"The Southern Slopes have been enjoyed for recreational purposes by thousands of people during the past 40 years and we remain committed to ensuring that this will continue for the future benefit of the citizens of Canterbury."

As many as 25 witnesses are expected to give oral evidence in favour of the application at the public hearing and a further 20 statements considered by the inspector.

University of Kent spokesman Martin Herrema said: "I can confirm that the university will be represented at this public inquiry."



A copy of the inspector's directions setting out the procedure to be followed for the submission of evidence and the format the public inquiry will take is available at [www.kent.gov.uk/villagegreens](http://www.kent.gov.uk/villagegreens).

Anyone wanting to give evidence at the inquiry – who is not already called as a witness by one of the parties – must notify

the county council and provide written and signed statement setting out the substance of their evidence no later than Monday, February 16.

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