



## The Ruskin Fields Group

Chaired by Zoe Traill (01865 768697) and Veronica Hurst (01865 750484)

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Mr. M. Crofton-Briggs  
Head of City Development  
Oxford City Council  
Ramsay House  
10 St. Ebbe's Street  
Oxford OX1 1PT

8 March 2011

Dear Mr. Crofton-Briggs,

We would like to place on record our strong objection to the proposal that the fields to the north of Ruskin College and within close proximity to the listed building and crinkle-crankle wall should be included in the Council's list of sites suitable for development.

Much of the charm and character of the Conservation Area of Old Headington comes from the fields at its periphery which separate the historic central core of the village from its urban surroundings, and give it its rural feel. The *Oxford Local Plan* confirms that the City Council will "use its planning powers to preserve and enhance the special character, appearance, and setting of each Conservation Area". Development of the Ruskin fields would be wholly incompatible with this remit and would damage the amenities not just of local residents, but of the wider communities of Headington, Northway, and Marston.

Contrary to Ruskin College's suggestion, the fields do not form a logical extension to the Barton Area development, since building on Council-owned land, safeguarded for development, is very different from destroying heritage assets such as green open spaces which have survived since the enclosure of common land. In addition, there is no 'logic' in planning a new community by building it on both sides of a very busy road. Any development of the fields would add significantly to traffic movements in Headington where as you know, congestion is already a major problem for residents and visitors alike.

When the first local consultation on the Barton Area Action Plan was held in July 2010, the Ring Road was explicitly named as its southern boundary. We are extremely concerned that Ruskin College appears to be attempting to secure a change in the scope of the land

associated with the Barton AAP without any notice being given to interested parties or further consultation. The question of whether due process has been followed inevitably arises, and we would appreciate your comments on this matter in particular.

The fields north of the Rookery have a long and interesting history both as a part of the rural landscape and as a community resource. Indeed, in the past these fields have been deliberately preserved by the Council from building proposed by a developer, and were protected with a restrictive covenant by later owners. Over the last 40 years they have been used and valued by local people from Northway and Headington as an open space for dogwalking (witness the footpaths shown via satellite views), picnicking, blackberrying, and as a place for local children to play.

The fields and hedgerows contribute to the biodiversity of the area and link to the wildlife corridor from Marston, which entitles them to environmental protection under policies NE.17 and NE.20. They also perform a vital role in providing an open and rural setting for the Conservation Area, which will only become more significant with the proposed Barton development on the land opposite.

We therefore urge you, in the light of the policies set out in PPS4 and PPS5, and the significance of this heritage asset, to remove Ruskin College's fields from the Sites and Housing Development Plan Options document which is now in preparation, and from any other list of sites for potential development.

Yours sincerely,

Zoe Traill (10, St. Andrew's Road, Headington, OX3 9DL)

Veronica Hurst (9, Stoke Place, Headington, OX3 9BX)

Copies to:

Councillor David Rundle  
Councillor Ruth Wilkinson  
Oxford City Planning Policy Unit  
The Friends of Old Headington  
Headington Action  
Oxford Preservation Trust  
Oxford Civic Society

