

## Written Address To Council

### Barton and Ruskin – Chalk and Cheese

#### Councillors

The Barton project carries a high degree of risk – financial, environmental and social, or simply partial failure.

Will housing so well located in the middle of the country on the edge of the city be snapped up by an army of consultants?

Will pinching tight one of the most important economic arteries of Oxford reduce economic growth?

Do we know the freeing up effect on the general housing market by the recent wave of new student accommodation?

What is the cumulative effect of hundreds of applications that turn one bedroom houses into two bedrooms, two bedrooms to three that clog Planningfinder every week?

Has the Council reviewed its housing stock for similar gains?

How will Barton help those on the housing register? The actual figure, excluding transfers, is approximately 4,600 of which approximately 60% are for one bedroom non family accommodation, clearly Barton with a 5-10% one bedroom housing is not intended for this.

A local family with a new arrival needs a three bedroom house, but frees a two bedroom one – has this been calculated?

What are the effects on housing demand caused by the downturn in a public sector city?

Can empty nesters living in a much loved house redolent with the memory of parted ones be given helping hand to share some of their space and supplement their income?

How about policies to free up the 12,000 employer parking spaces in the NE area for housing and reduce in-commuting?

Will workers relocating from further afield cause point loading on the transport network?

Why build in the city?

Ahh, says the wise man, to reduce the need to travel, Why? Ahh, says the wise man, to reduce emissions – but will stationary vehicles in the fourth most congested city in the UK emit more, longer, and more dangerously, directly into the lungs of deprived children below them at Barton?

How often has the school run, the wet day, the broken down car, cause havoc? Very slight changes in traffic volumes or circumstances can have severe impacts which even chaos theory and expert analysis cannot predict.

Perhaps the only blackberry and apple picking going on near Ruskin will be angry citizens in long queues who should be home with their families tweeting their Councillors, and not with “thx”

You don't dissolve poverty by concentrating it. Might it still be possible to spread deprivation and achieve genuinely mixed communities throughout the city?

All of the above are questions that must raise doubts - I don't know the answers, but more importantly, neither do you, but here is the point of all of the above:

The Ruskin development adds approximately 20% to the whole – making Barton work will be a tightrope walk, adding Ruskin will be a high wire act, piling risk on risk, negative on negative.

If it is included in BAAP, it will compromise the soundness of the whole. If it is allocated a site DPD, it will bring its plans to fruition far quicker than Barton, meaning the risks above will be borne by entirely by the public purse as the last cab off the rank.

There is one “chalk and cheese” fundamental difference between Barton and Ruskin – in the case of Barton there is a presumption in favour of development, for Ruskin a “clear and convincing” reason under PPS5 must exist for very substantial damage to a designated conservation asset.

It will only ever be “clear and convincing” when each and every option above and yet more have been explored and rejected.

The decision you make regarding Ruskin Fields will affect the soul and fabric of this city for generations, for if you accept that high density development on a greenfield site in a Conservation Area next to large, and becoming larger, deprived housing estates with almost no private green space, in the area of the city with the least, then any developer, in any ward, has only to prove his scheme isn't any worse than as Ruskin's, and field by field, park by park each and every last patch of greenery will be built on.

Is that what you intend? The question will be irrelevant, as by creating a precedent, the Council will have no longer be able to refuse.

The SHLAA report shows that including Barton, and even without windfalls or scores of DPD sites under assessment, the city is on track to deliver its boom based housing target of 8000 houses.

I am not denying the very real housing need in this city, but we need to clearly understand it and lets find solutions that give the best possible outcome for people's lives.

Ruskin will fly an eco-friendly faux flag of convenience, stating lack of car parking provision - sorry, no - it simply means valuable space is used for private profit and the infrastructure is dumped on the public domain.

It will claim to open up space - sorry, no - you don't gain green space by concreting over it, and the large “Trespassers Keep Out” signs placed 100s of metres from its nearest building on stated security grounds indicate that even the tokenistic replacement will be of the most limited and highly controlled nature.

Ruskin fields represent a last tiny, accessible fragment of English countryside, that has a long history of public access, do not deprive the deprived of this – let their voice be heard.

When this Council declared the Conservation Area, a promise was made by you, to us, to keep this for the enjoyment of future generations – you should not break that trust just because it is now tougher to keep.

I know that many of you will share at least part of my concerns.

Last but not least, I want to thank the Council – I think has shown it has the ability to listen to the voices of many in the community, recognising their concerns, and having the courage to say “no” to Ruskin when the facts so clearly weigh against the proposal.

Thank for you time

Mark Pitt  
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