

East Minchery Farm

Comments on Site and Housing Development Plan Document – Proposed Submission Draft

The site has been the hub of positive community action for the past three years. It has brought neighbours together through a huge range of activities including community picnics, berry treasure hunts, clearing days for allotment patches, archaeological digs, communal orchard tree planting, and poetry days for children. The site, because its size, it's ability to accommodate large groups of people without having a disturbing impact on any neighbouring properties, has empowered a long struggling community and given them the will to get involved in positive change in their area. As the document rightfully recognises the site is currently being used for growing vegetables by local residents and is regularly used for leisure activities, therefore it is misleading to say the site is disused.

Within the document the council say they are please to have received responses from the South east of the City which is normally difficult to engage, and that strong representations have been received against East Minchery Farm development. However, it seems as though our oppositions and the reasons for which have not been taken into consideration, rather, we have been ignored. We want to know; why are we not being heard? Some sites have been taken out in response to opposition! There is strong opposition against any development on East Minchery Farm from the Blackbird Leys, Northfield Brook and Littlemore Community Wards. This is a bad example of local democracy. We would be more reluctant to come forward with comments in the future for the fact you have not listened.

The document states that the council are keen to work with the local community to strike a balance between housing and safe public open space, to propose to retain only 25% of the site as a public open space is not a balanced split between housing and open spaces, particularly as the green space study shows there is 80% deficit of open green spaces. Given the added pressure the high density of people will put on the area, a more appropriate proposal would be for a reverse split of housing/ open space allocation: 25% of the land used for housing 75% reserved as a secure public open space

The description of the biodiversity of the site does not do the site justice. This site is an oasis of biodiversity in an area where highly homogenous formal landscaping has diminished so much of what nature had to offer freely. Local residents have witnessed a number of badgers and monk jacks on the site and slow worms and common lizards have been a regular point of fascination to the local children. For them to be relocated to another site would deprive local children from another great opportunity to have a better understanding of nature and their natural environment.

It is very encouraging to see the council acknowledge that access onto the site should be improved, this is something the local community has been constantly campaigning for 3 three years. It is, however, disheartening that they will only acknowledge the access issues now that there is a profit at stake and have avoided addressing the issue for so long despite there being the wellbeing of children and disabled people at stake, as the same access routes are the main public rights of way to Oxford Academy for the children living on Falcon Close.

What the Housing Development Plan document seems to have ignored/overlooked

1) Local Authorities Duties to Provide Allotments

Section 23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 states that allotment authorities must provide a sufficient number of allotments and let them to persons resident in the area. If there are a number of people in the local area who are keen to have an allotment, then they could make representations to the parish council under section 23(2) of the 1908 Act. The council has a duty to consider representations from 6 or more registered parliamentary electors in the parish.

The allotments federation and Falcon Close Residents Association have a waiting list for allotment land. Why is it that representations made to the council have been ignored?

2) The Government has plans to introduce a new Community Right to Reclaim Land. This will enable communities to challenge, with the Government's help, whether hundreds of public bodies are making best use of their land and property. Used on its own, or in conjunction with other Community Rights (for example, to Buy), this will mean that where land that is important locally is not being made best use of, communities will have a much better chance of getting hold of that land or property. In such cases communities will then be able to use this land, depending on its circumstances, for a variety of purposes, including redeveloping it for use as a community garden, park or as space for food growing and other community activities.

Your document does not reveal why your plans for development for that site are paramount to the plans developed by the local community. In fact your document does not show that there *is* another side. You are aware Falcon Close Residents Association have a business plan to develop the land for community use.

3) New Neighbourhood Planning provisions in the Localism Bill will provide communities with a means to boost the amount of space for food growing with powers to protect existing allotments and identify new plots. A referendum at the end of the process ensures communities have the final say on whether a neighbourhood development plan or development order comes into force in their area.

People in Communities have the final say, not Oxford City Council.

In light of this we will appeal to the secretary of state against any application for more than 25% of the site to be developed for housing.

Falcon Close Residents Association