

Minute Item 21

Ruskin Fields

Note only - What is the value of Ruskin Fields?

These are the LAST meadows and countryside in the entire North East area, a green lung which will soon be surrounded by the city – where, for a precious few yards between Barton West, Northway, Stoke Place, Headington and the A40, we see a pastoral scene, hear trees rustling, and admire flowers, spot deer, foxes and other wildlife.

It comes down to two basic issues:

Is there any alternative to building 185 houses on this land?

Who needs green space and who will be the victim of its loss?

There is a presumption against development in a Conservation Area, ie you better have a damn good reason – so what is it?

The Ruskin development is 2% of the 9000 house sites already identified via the Core Strategy with more to come.

How about the 20 Hectares, or 2/3 Barton West, of the 12,000 destination parking spaces of the top 10 North East employers , mostly Headington Hospitals?

Is it beyond imagination that we could dispense with this anachronism, cut congestion and provide housing in such sustainable locations?

Of course, it is not as simple as that – or is it?

Lose Ruskin Fields or part of them and you have set a precedent that declares open season on all our precious remaining countryside fragments

Say “yes” to Ruskin, and you cannot say “no” ever again.

You may be forgiven for assuming this about the privileged folk of Old Headington with leafy green gardens to have a jolly walk and blackberry and apple pie against needy families.

So - Is this about class warfare? The rich versus the poor?

We could have diluted and dispersed poverty, and poverty of expectations, rather than intensify and concentrate it as at Barton West, adding to the social deprivation arc from Northway to Blackbird Leys – thats done but Ruskin Fields is not.

Lets imagine future Barton West, the people love the fields for the joy they bring, the daily walk with its five minute breath of the countryside – then we say, “sorry but these fields are being concreted over for a new housing estate..”

Imagine the outrage and anger, yet their voice will never be heard, and thank you they will not.

Is it too much to ask that a child from a poor background can enjoy a green field? Spot wildlife, or pick up sticks, stones or eggshells, hear the rustle of trees?

No leafy green gardens for the children of Barton West.

I have a vision of these families walking along the priceless Stoke Place green lane and the fields while the children catch butterflies, but of course this is private land.

If we take the rights of private property literally we would have “TRESPASSERS KEEP OUT “ notices to this day on the Peak District National Park – it is clear which side of history lies.

Do we say yes of course, there are 3000 of you living at Barton West, under Policy CS21 you have 17 hectares of green space, but drive to Port Meadow to enjoy it, and not only that, we will take even the 3.5 hectares of Ruskin Fields to boot?

Are we going to fob them off with featureless arable fields of Elsfield Hill, that leads nowhere?

Headington Cemetery? Featureless football fields at Northway? A patronising linear park with a few bits of plastic for the children? Tiny Dunstan Park? Anyone for cricket?

The Ruskin Fields development gives less rights to the least advantaged to enjoy England's green and pleasant land equally with others in this city.

Note – Appeal

This may be the last Council meeting before these fields are lost – once a site allocation policy is decided, the Council will have all but ceded the power to prevent it.

If you care more about :

building lives rather than houses

our priceless heritage

poor children having the same access to green space as better off ones

The Council's reputational damage after the conservation area reduction

you must act NOW.

Dont let our greed for housing blind us to the needs of those that live there.

Lord Mayor, you have a constitutional responsibility to act as the conscience of the Council:

It is unconscionable to destroy this priceless asset

It is unconscionable to deprive already deprived people access to England's green and pleasant land

So please :

SAVE RUSKIN FIELDS

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