Mark Pott
Headington Heritage
Saving Headington's Heritage
A Personal Blog

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Introduction

This addresses Stage 2 of the enquiry OLP2045 providing additional information in response to the Submission by UWL requesting allocation of LP2036 – SP56 [5], Ruskin Campus (SPE13) and Ruskin Field (SPE14) in LP2045.

This should be read alongside of Headington Heritage's representation [6] Part 2, re Ruskin Field starting at PDF page 64.

Every effort is made to not reproduce information contained therein, only additional material is presented here as per guidelines in view of the request to allocate LP2036 SP56 by Ruskin/UWL.

References

Ref	Title	Local Plan Ref.
1.	*Barton AAP CD 7.24b Ruskin College Comments on Barton SA Addendum .pdf p.3*	Core Strategy and Barton AAP 2011 (reffed here)
2.	*Barton AAP RB13 Appendix O Masterplan.pdf*	Core Strategy and Barton AAP 2011
3.	*Report to Oxford City Council, REPORT ON THE EXAMINATION INTO BARTON AREA ACTION PLAN, 13 April 2012, PINS/G3310/429/5, Shelagh Bussey MA, Dip TP, DIP EM, PhD, MRTPI, 14/11/2012*	Core Strategy and Barton AAP 2011.
4.	*Matter 6 Written Statement - Site SP57 - Oxford City Council.pdf*	LP2036 (Current 2019)
5.	*156___John_Rhodes_for_Quod_on_behalf_of_Uni_of_West_London*	LP2045 Rep
6.	*138___Mark_Pott_on_behalf_of_Headington_Heritage_Redacted.pdf*	LP2045 Rep
7.	*103___Dr_Judith_Webb_Redacted_Clean.pdf*	LP2045 Rep
8.	*Appendix 7 - Reg. 19 Summary of Responses 1 1.pdf*	LP2045

All documents are available on request [1-4]

Matters Addressed

Matter 4 – Site Selection Methodology

Issue 1 – Site Selection Methodology

Q8 How did the Council consider the suitability of sites already allocated for development in the Oxford Local Plan 2036?

Issue 3 – Marston Road and Old Road Area of Focus

Matter 5 – Site Allocations

SPE14 – Ruskin Field

Q1 What is the site boundary based on and is it justified?

Q2 How has the scale of residential development been established and is Policy SPE14 justified and effective, having particular regard to the context of the site and the need to make an efficient use of land?

Q4 Is the allocation justified and consistent with national planning policy insofar as heritage matters are concerned? What information is available to demonstrate that the site can be developed in a way that preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the Old Headington Conservation Area and the setting of neighbouring listed buildings?

Submission Summary

This submission demonstrates:

- That the site rejection of Ruskin Fields (HELAA 463) in the Barton AAP examination applied to both LP2036 SP56 and SPE14
- That the allocation of now site LP20236 SP56 was procedurally flawed and based on incorrect evidence
- The correct procedure for LP2045 was followed in relation to SP20236 SP56.
- That development of LP2036 SP56 has substantive ecological and heritage reasons for non-allocation as does SPE14
- There is a risk that LP2036 SP56 could be developed prior to start of LP2045, followed by any allocation in LP2045
- Multiple errors in the QUOD submission [5]

Therefore, both SPE14 and LP20236 should NOT be allocated in SP2045.

Site History – SPE13, SPE14, and SP56

The land which was determined as unsuitable for development by Shelagh Bussey MA DipTP DipEM PhD MRTPI in 2011/12 in the Core Strategy 2016 and Barton AAP was to HELAA site 463, which comprises of now LP2036 SP56 and SPE14 as below:

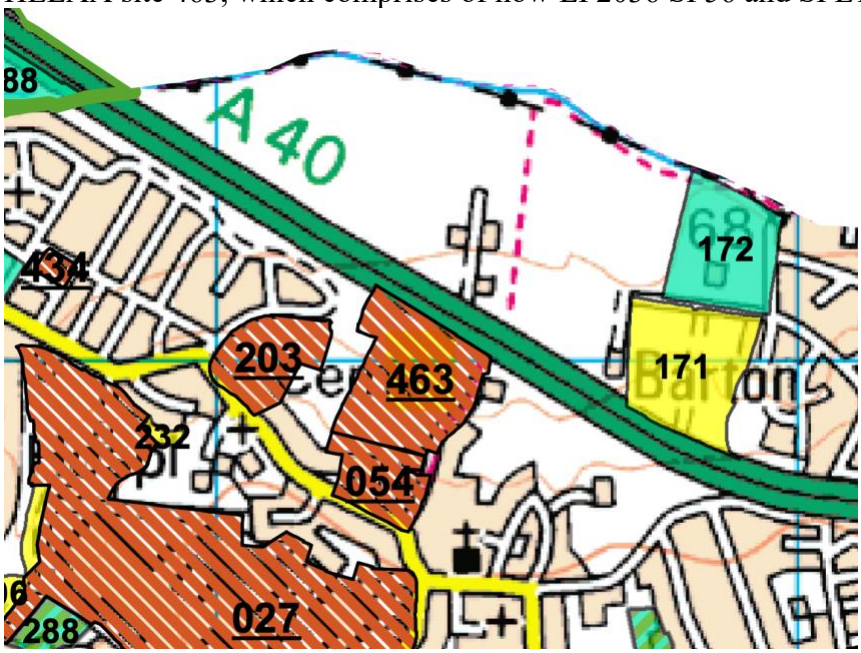


Fig: HELAA – Site 463 - Between Dunstan Park and Stoke Place

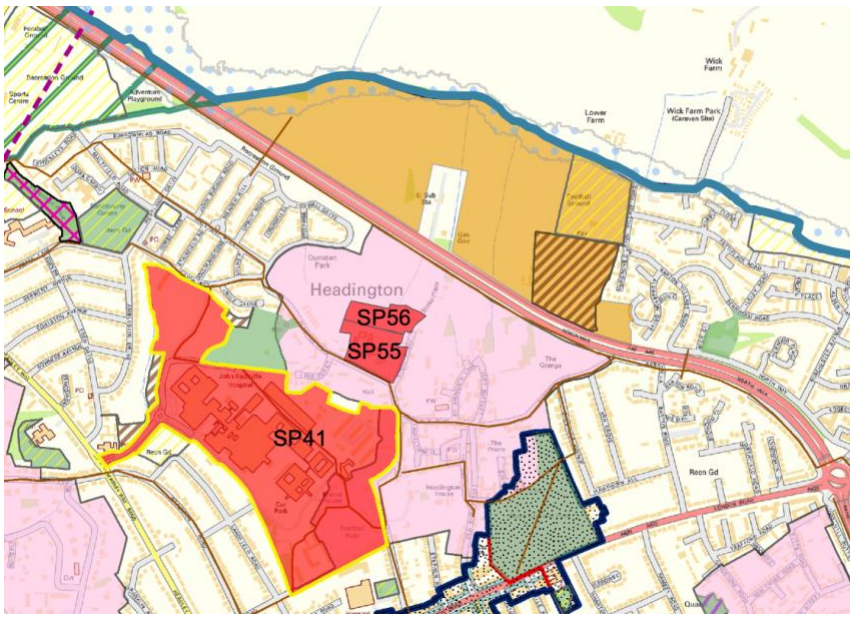


Fig: Local Plan 2036 Ruskin SP55 and SP56



Fig: Sites – SPE13, SP56+SPE14 = SPE13 HELAA/SHLAA 463 (green)

Core Strategy and Barton AAP Site Rejection 2012

The Planning Inspector for the Core Strategy and Barton AAP (2011) conducted an in-depth review comprising of multiple hearings to determine the soundness of the Barton AAP including the proposed allocation of Ruskin Fields (HELAA 463) and concluded they were unsuitable for development.

Consequently, it is important to be certain of those boundaries which were and are challenged in Local Plans LP2036 and LP2045 to understand the applicability of the precedent which was set.

The Ruskin Master Plan

The Ruskin Master Plan 2012 [2] reproduced a "large" Zonal Master Plan [p.1] showing the intended development for 150 houses prior to the adverse SA Appraisal Addendum findings, [DO] and a "small" proposal [p.3] to address the Inspector's concerns, prior to final, negative, determination by the Inspector:

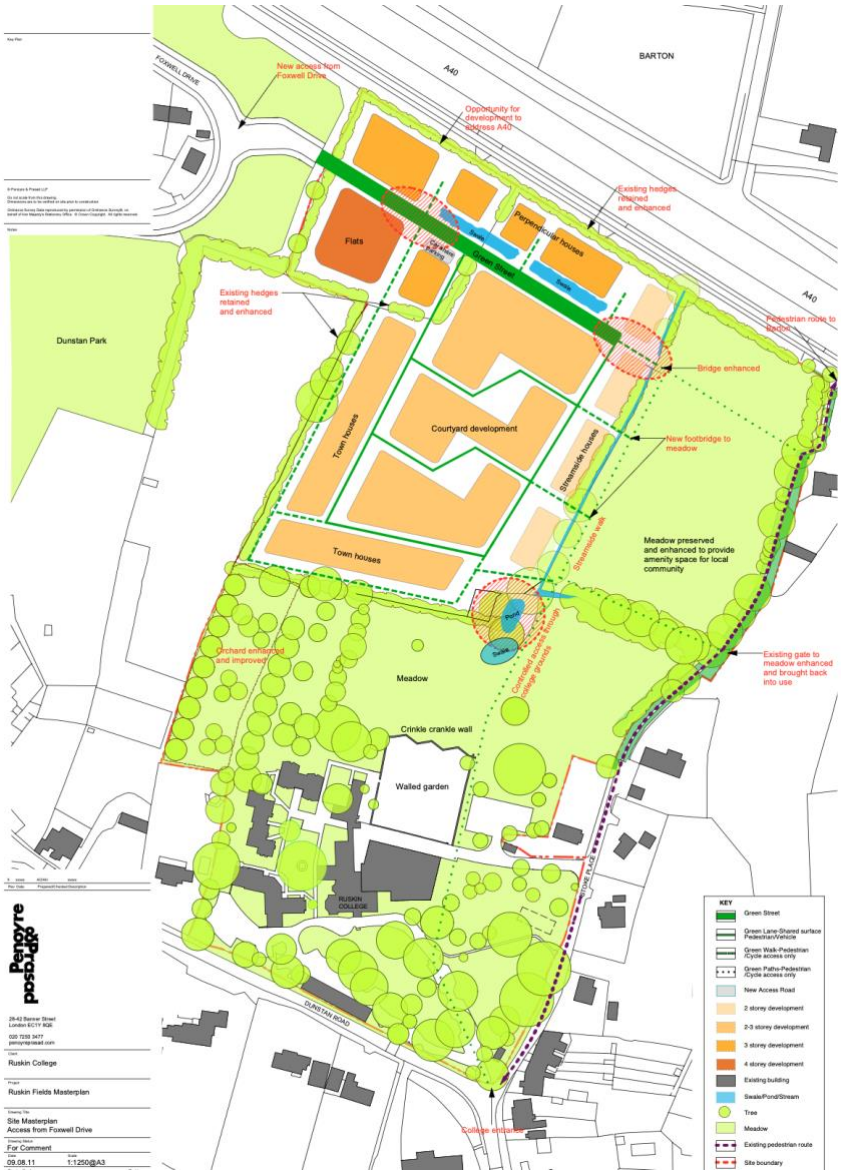


Fig: The "Large" Master Plan (reduced from an even larger one) [p.1]



Fig: The "small" Proposal - Ruskin Response to the adverse SA Addendum [p.3]

Both were intended to demonstrate the feasibility of development on HELAA site 463:

The proposed zonal masterplan was for around 150 new homes on two fields to the northwest, with the eastern field retained as amenity space. This sought to test the capacity of the site from a development perspective.[p.2]

It also included a development area as below: [p.16] which encompassed both the large and small plans above:



Fig: Appendix 1of Master Plan

The Barton AAP Inspector's Response

Several suggested schemes have been submitted for Ruskin Fields residential development, including 50% affordable housing, and provision for public open space at Ruskin Fields, all of which fall within the two options that were re-assessed in the addendum SA. The larger option assessed is for between 175-193 dwellings and smaller is for around 70 homes.

……

The scoring of the two options against some of the SA objectives has been challenged. I agree that the significantly negative score given for both options in respect of SA objective 13: to conserve and enhance Oxford's biodiversity, is not supported by the evidence, which indicates that both options, particularly the smaller, would have a less damaging impact than that indicated in the SA. However, I consider that all of the other SA objectives have been scored appropriately and, for the reasons that I give below, the decision to reject the option of development at Ruskin Fields remains sound.[3]

It is of note that SP56 was not intended for development due to its sensitivity.

Local Plan 2036 Inspection

The Inspector for LP2036 (who was on his own as his colleague broke his leg early in the enquiry) was only asked to determine the soundness of Ruskin Campus (SP55) and Ruskin Field (southern) now SP56, then SP57) site allocations (see above) and had no awareness of, or examine, the overall site context.

The importance of the site was so underrated, that I personally had to ask for a site hearing which was granted in 2019.

The representation I made then, is that SP56 constituted part of HELAA 463 as per above, and the original rejection therefore pertained, and it was not suitable for development.

Subsequently, after the consultation period the Council stated in its response to Matter 6L (Nov 2019) [4]:

Design and heritage impacts and Barton Area Action Plan

6.12.6 At Regulation 19 stage 6 comments were made saying that the allocation of this site was unsound. Three of these comments noted conservation area concerns, including one that referenced the previous rejection of the site from the Barton Area Action Plan. This included a representation made by Headington Heritage, which was drawn again to the Inspectors' attention during the period for submitting written statements relating to the Matters and Issues raised by the Inspectors. This noted that the Barton Area Action Plan Inspector had rejected the 'entire' site.

…

A site area from the masterplan submitted to inform the Barton AAP is attached as Appendix 1. This shows that the full site area considered at the AAP examination did not include the part of the land that comprises the site allocation in Policy SP57. [Note: NOW SP56] It is therefore considered that the conclusions reached at the previous examination are of little materiality to the soundness of the current policy.[4]

Appendix 1 is shown below, only with two out of the three fields in the original Master Plan submission.

Appendix1

Extract from the Master Plan submitted by Ruskin College to inform the Barton AAP show area considered



Fig: Appendix 1 of Council Submission for SP57 – Only two Fields shown

Analysis

The Ruskin Fields (HELAA 463) rejection by the Inspector of the Barton AAP was arrived at after an exhaustive enquiry comprising of many hearings and stages.

The Barton AAP inspector, could, and did, only determine the development suitability of the whole site, and if approved, develop a site policy.

It was completely outside her remit to determine whether a particular developer's plan was appropriate or not, this would be via Planning Application. In any case Ruskin's Master Plan marked the whole of HELAA 463 as part of the plan, whether developed or not.

The only function of the submission of plans by Ruskin was to persuade development could be achieved, which failed to convince her.

In contrast, the Inspector for LP2036, who approved the Site Allocation of SP56, had little or no awareness of the overall site context.

Further, incredibly, the Council used a developer's plan (Appendix 1 above) to "prove" that LP2036 SP56 was not included, rather than use the official Barton AAP records, even more incredibly the Inspector accepted this and proceeded with the site allocation. This was a serious breach of procedure and fundamentally flawed methodology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Inspector of the Current LP2036 was misled into believing only two fields were rejected for development in the Barton AAP inspection.

The Barton AAP site rejection of both of HELAA 463, now SPE14 and LP2036 SP56 was, and remains, correct. The subsequent site allocation of SP2036 SP56 was clearly in error.

Was the Correct Process Followed in LP2045?

It is clear from OCCs response summary [8], PDF p391, comments 3165-3168, that Ruskin was given repeated opportunities to add LP2036 SP56 to the list of sites for consideration, but failed to do so.

The issue is not that the correct process for allocation was not followed, but it was never started by the applicant. Possibly, Ruskin may have intended to commence development prior to the expiry of the current plan. If Ruskin did not respond to a call for sites, it has only itself to blame.

There is a danger that following acceptance of SPE14 (God forbid) and prior to the adoption of LP2045, a planning application could be approved and groundworks initiated for LP2036 SP56. The current status is therefore very unsatisfactory.

The grounds for rejection are clearly articulated by the Council, and that is an end to the matter. It can, of course, come forward as a windfall site outside of the Local Plan.

LP2036 SP56 Allocation Objections

Summary

In addition to the objections listed in the Headington Heritage objection to SPE14, the current LP2036 SP56 policy is not justified or sound.

A summary only is given here pending a more formal consultation should a main modification be proposed all objections to SPE14 pertain as well.

The southernmost Ruskin Field (SP56) an island of green surrounded by concrete:

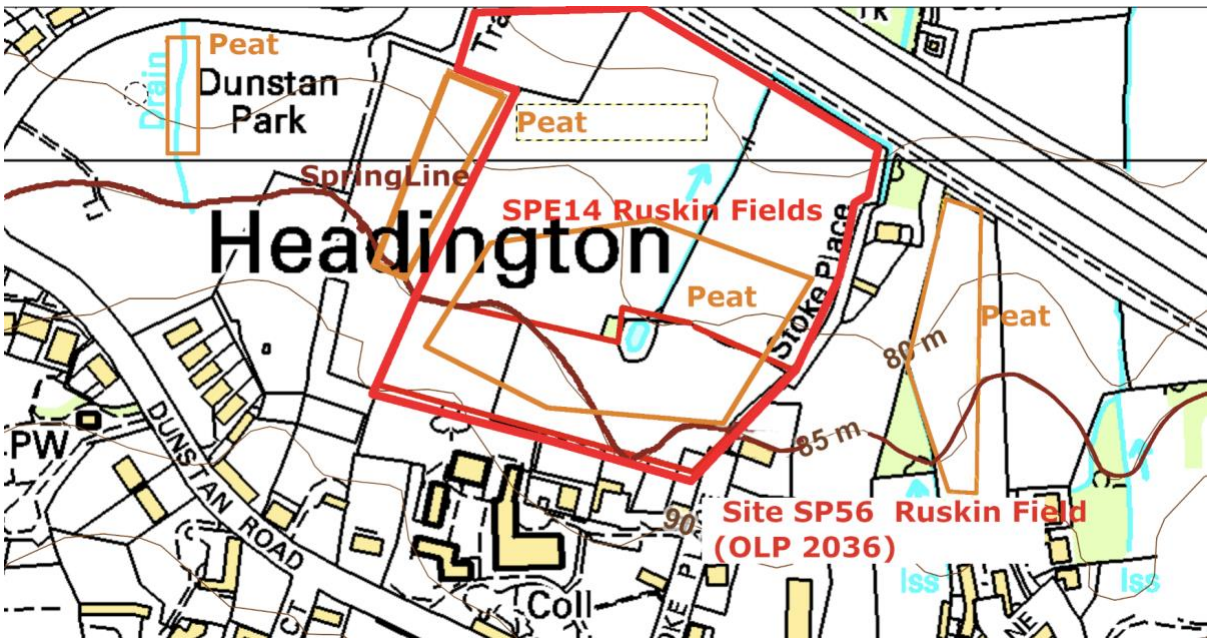
- The most sensitive part of the formerly rejected site HELAA 463 with the most trees, at the most prominent part of it, on a slope
- A public amenity providing green space
- Near to Barton Park, which has less green space per inhabitant that Tower Hamlets
- Part of a wildlife corridor to Dunstan Park especially for invertebrates on the springline surrounding Headington Hill at 85m. (See Appendix – Judy Webb)
- Contains multiple calcareous spring emergences and peat reserves
- Severe impairment of significant recognised conservation views
- Consented housing on Elsfield (LNBB) will have a direct view of SP56, adding to its value for visual receptors
- Impacts on the “green belt” of Old Headington that defines it as a distinct “village in a city”
- Has a very low “carrying capacity” due to sloped land, springs, an orchard and a calcareous valley and pond and extensive trees and vegetation, meaning development is unjustified

Contrary to the following policies of the NPPF, it does not respect p.170 of the NPPF protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, p96, and p97 (access to open spaces)

In view of the above development constraints, any development here would be too small to be justified in relation to the damage it would do.

Fen, Peat and Hydrology – SPE13, SP56, SPE14

In my response to LP2025 Reg 19 [2] (p.24,25,28,36,40,68) it was indicated that calcareous springs and fens surround the Headington area with emergences at the Lye Valley, Headington Hill, Dunstan Park, Ruskin Fields and Larkins Lane. These latter follow the 85m contour (**Brown** line below):



The following is an updated appraisal of peat deposits over the three sites, based on Lidar and the work of Judy Webb, refer Appendix 1:



Fig: Sites, HELAA/SHLAA 463 (green) and=SP56+SPE14, Peat, Fen and Hydrology



Fig: Hidden Valley and Stream to Pond - LIDAR (Ref HELAA image)

The above shows the extensive distribution of peat in the Ruskin Fields area, and locations of springs and attendant wildlife.

Errors in Quod Submission

Statement

When assessed by the City Council, the land has been consistently found to be suitable for development. The following summaries are drawn from the Council's own Site Assessments.

Response

The Core Strategy and Barton AAP 2016 rejected the site as above this is not referred to. The Local Plans of 2040, 2042 (both withdrawn) and 2045 are essentially the same plan so cannot be used to justify allocation as none have been approved.

Statement

They relate specifically to the land immediate north of and within the curtilage of the existing College Campus and which is allocated as a site for development in the Oxford Local Plan 2036 as Site LP2036 SP56.

Response

SP56 is not in the curtilage, it is a separate field with substantial woodland and foliage with a wholly rural character.

Statement

In practice, the site's previous contribution as a transition to open countryside has been substantially changed by the construction of the bypass and by the substantial and growing development at Barton. The policy should more positively recognise the site as a significant and unique opportunity to meet much needed housing requirements at a highly sustainable location within the city.

Response

HELAA site 463 does not contribute at all to the setting of the OHCA (Old Headington Conservation Area) it IS the Conservation Area, it is that which is to be preserved.
The addition of Barton Park (889 Houses) and the Land North of Bayswater Brook (LNBB) developments (1500+ houses) adds to the value of the land, functioning as green belt and ecological corridor.

Statement

Prior to the University acquiring Ruskin College in 2022, the previous owners of the College agreed with the City Council a masterplan for this site that was discussed and adopted/approved by the then Planning Committee. Whilst the Plan was light on detail, the land was clearly designated for expansion of the College should the need arise in the future.

Response

No formal application was made, and consequently no formal decisions were made. From memory from memory Ruskin simply presented the masterplan to receive comments and feedback, there was no approval process, neither is it clear that this included SP56.

Statement

That SP56 was deallocated

Response

It was not, it was simply not allocated in LP2045

Appendix – Part of Response by Judy Webb

This submission[7] and others are used as input to the hydrology map above.

Planning Policy for Ruskin Campus site SPE 13

I'm still concerned about water flow downslope from a spring emergence zone just to the northern edge of the red line limit of this campus development where I have seen a flowing spring, marsh plants and peat development a few years ago. There is probably some degree of artesian pressure. How will campus development not interrupt this flow and keep it unpolluted?

This spring water will keep on flowing and affecting the fields in site SPE 14 below. 'Biodiversity enhancements' are being suggested for this zone between the two sites as a consequence of development. Enhancing the zone here would entail probably retaining water by blocking drainage, removing scrub and making a really wet fen habitat as was historically

the situation before damaging drainage. Public access would need to be restricted due to wetness (it cannot be a pocket park) and the site would need annual vegetation management such as happens in Lye Valley SSSI. A wetland site sandwiched between two urban development sites where public access is banned due to fragile peat seems unlikely to survive or be much appreciated to me. It would be isolated; development never helps wildlife in my experience, despite all claims. All such important calcareous spring-fen sites need a wide green undeveloped buffer and good green connectivity to other wetland sites around th hillside for specific fen invertebrates to move between them, and good annual cutting/ raking management must happen in perpetuity to preserve returning plant biodiversity. How will this be ensured and make things better for the wetland wildlife than the current situation of being in a totally green undeveloped surrounding area?