

The Proposed Development at Englishcombe Lane Field

Jonathan Tecks on behalf of the Friends of Englishcombe Lane Field (FELF)

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Chair, Members of Council,

On behalf of the Friends of Englishcombe Lane Field, thank you for your time.

Englishcombe Lane Field is home to a rare habitat known as a 'tufa' which occurs when water runs over a limestone base. It attracts a particular range of wildlife: (see the 'tufafeld' website).

Sloping steeply, the area is dotted with springs. Much of the water is absorbed and held by the lush Field which acts as a natural sink and protects nearby properties.

The Field also forms part of an 'ecological corridor', linking Stirtingale Farm, Moorlands Park and Linear Park, from Bath's southern boundary down to the river. In short, it fulfils many functions.

There have been sporadic moves over the years to develop the Field. Last summer, the Planning Committee approved an application to build 37 units by a single (casting) vote. This, despite consistent and reasoned opposition.

The Council's own ecology officer objected to the development as non-compliant with (Placemaking) Policy NE3.

Residents resisted the development as designed to minimal standards (with a narrow access road and a single, narrow pavement). Above all, the natural protective sink would be replaced by hard surfaces and artificial drainage requiring perpetual maintenance.

Since the summer, a decision has been on hold. The Council, we understand, is considering its options. We thank Cllrs Romero and David for engaging with residents. In the meantime, a Petition to halt the development has attracted some 4,500 signatures.

The partial update of the Local Plan has given us all a pause for reflection.

We welcome proposed policy changes to better protect ecology and to preserve and enhance green corridors, as well as to promote more sustainable travel. This should mean higher environmental standards for future developments.

It also seems clear that future housing requirements could be met from other available sites. The impact of Covid-19 on the city centre, releasing vacant retail properties for residential use, points towards more city centre living.

For these reasons, the proposed development at Englishcombe Lane is neither necessary nor appropriate. We urge the Council to decide against it and, indeed, to remove this site from the Local Plan when the opportunity arises.

This would involve the Council cutting losses and giving up some potential gains. However, we strongly believe that the climate and ecological emergency requires a different way of thinking about natural assets. The Field should be valued for the many environmental functions it fulfils: a green lung along Englishcombe Lane; a home to bats, deer, and the plants and invertebrates associated with the Tufa flushes; and a vital holding space for water.

What should become of the Field?

We suggest a handover to the local community, following the model of Lyncombe Hill Fields. The 50-60 members of our Friends group feel passionately about the protection and good management of this local resource. They include many who would be keen to offer practical support.

Your listening to local views and input has brought positive responses in respect of Bath Meadows, Lyncombe Hill Fields and High Common Golf Course. Please listen to what we are saying about ELF.

Thank you for your attention.