

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

Green Party  
*for the South East of England*

November 5<sup>th</sup> 2007

Dear Councillor,

Later this month you will vote whether to allow a book depository for the Bodleian Library to be built at Osney Mead. I would like to take this opportunity to urge you to oppose the application and outline the reasons why I believe this is necessary.

- 1) Consideration of this planning application has already been delayed by the severe flooding that took place in July. Indeed, access roads to the proposed site were underwater only a few months ago. Osney Mead is on a flood plain, so, although the revised plans for the book depository include 2.2 metre high flood defences and the Environment Agency calculates the risk as minimal, it will always be prone to flooding. The Environment Agency has been wrong on many occasions and, as the likelihood of extreme weather increases due to climate change, it is virtually impossible to calculate the risks of storing part of our national heritage on such a vulnerable site. We simply cannot guarantee that future flooding would not breach the proposed defences, which, after all, have only been included as an after thought and are indicative of the scheme's overall lack of adequate consideration for the potential for flood damage.
- 2) Building on flood plains is ill advised, not simply because of the risks to the development itself, but also because of the impact further downstream. Flood defences may, in some circumstances, protect the Bodleian depository but if the Thames breaks its banks the water has to go somewhere, with those places that are not protected, including homes, invariably suffering.
- 3) Both Oxford Preservation Trust and the Council for the Protection of Rural England are opposed to this scheme, citing in particular its visual impact on the city. I share these objections and believe the building design is obtrusive and inappropriate for Oxford.
- 4) I understand that one of the main arguments in favour of the site is its proximity to the main library in Oxford and the ability to deliver books within a 3-hour timescale. Whilst I recognise the desirability of fulfilling such a requirement, again I do not believe this should override the very real threat of exposing books and documents to potential flooding.
- 5) I also fully appreciate the urgent need for the Bodleian Library to upgrade its facilities and am not opposed to this application going ahead in principle - my objection is concerned primarily with the site in question. In opting to develop land that it already owns, Oxford University appears to have allowed short-term budgetary considerations to dominate and failed to properly explore other potential sites in the city or beyond.

If this depository had been completed in 2006 there is every chance that immeasurable damage would already have been done to the books held there. What will happen if in 2008 Oxford faces even worse flooding - will the Bodleian Library revise its plans again? This kind of knee-jerk approach is simply not the answer. I hope that you will reject this planning application and call instead for a safe, accessible and unobtrusive site to be found as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.

Suite 58, The Hop Exchange, 24 Southwark Street, London SE1 1TY, UK  
Tel: 020 7407 6281 Fax: 020 7234 0183 E-mail: [carolinelucas@greenmps.org.uk](mailto:carolinelucas@greenmps.org.uk)  
Web: [www.carolinelucasmep.org.uk](http://www.carolinelucasmep.org.uk)