To: Planning at Oxford City Council

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**OBJECTION TO DIVERSION OF PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY 320/80 ON LAND TO EAST OF WARREN CRESCENT**

The Cowley Area Transport Group(CATG) is an informal network of people primarily concerned about transport and sustainability in the Cowley, Temple Cowley and Lye Valley areas of Oxford. CATG comments on transport matters within or influencing this area to local councils, and sometimes to other agencies or Government consultations.

The suggested footpath diversion is to accommodate proposed housing construction on ‘Warren Meadow’ in Warren Crescent. We object to this building on transport grounds that it will create further car movements in a constrained physical space. As in other areas of Oxford, car free developments should be arranged by covenant as these mean less traffic movements, less air pollution and potentially more use of space for very low-cost housing. The City does not have car free covenant proposals for this development. Housing in this location can also be rejected on ecological grounds, as the many objectors to building here have already stressed.

The main authors of this submission are regular users of Footpath 320/80. Its current condition, in a wet winter, reflects usage throughout the year. In principle, we believe that walking (and cycling) networks must be created and maintained with the convenience of the walker in mind, not the interests of private or public sector bodies. In consequence, the diversion of this footpath reflects the least appropriate reasoning in terms of what we see as the public interest.

Responding to *Local Planning Authority response to objections received in relation to the Order to divert public right of way 320/80 on land to the east of Warren Crescent, Oxford,* we offer the following comments:

Item 4, page 1: With reference to 13/01555/CT3, delivery of any development on this site, under consideration for housing since 2003 at least, is exceptionally compromised by the ground conditions in this area. The footpath, and the informal play area it borders in Warren Crescent, also known locally as ‘Warren Meadow,’ is on made-up ground. Landslips have occurred in this area, into the Lye Valley Nature Reserve below, over a period of decades, making development of this site potentially hazardous. Specifically, the layers of soil and building waste in Warren Meadow are up to 5 metres thick and situated on a natural valley slope where springs are buried. The City Council intends to build both housing and space for car parking to add to the weight on this land, known to be unstable and only currently held in place by trees and scrub woodland at its edge and on the steep made ground slope into the Lye Valley.

Protection of the public, the nature reserve and the SSSI adjacent requires that this not take place, meaning the City Council will have to re-consider its approach to this area. This means there is no sustainable or realistic development cause to divert the footpath, since other sites for building council housing are available: particularly around, above or over car parks. The ground conditions also imply that exceptional works would be needed to support the weight of housing in this area which would be prejudicial to the permeation of water underground through the Beckley Sands/Limestone into the Lye Valley’s very rare wetland fen SSSI. In short, the public interest in the footpath remaining where it is as a transport issue coincides with the public interest in protecting the public against potential landslips and therefore potential liability for the Council. The public interest is also not served by entirely avoidable sums of money being spent on foundations/support. Consequently, other arguments for the continuation of the proposed development in this location fall since ground conditions have not been considered in a reasonable or proper manner.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Item 5, p.1. It is not difficult to see where FP80 is located: we consider this comment to be misleading.

Item 15, p.5. The observations of officers about levels of use of the path when visiting are not pertinent. Oxford has a growing population, meaning that walking networks and especially through precious green spaces, will need permanent protection for future generations of users over many decades into the future. Lockdown conditions also appear to have caused the growing numbers of people working at home to make more use of green spaces.[[2]](#footnote-2) A re-routed footpath onto the tarmacked pavement would not provide that opportunity.

Item 16, p.3. This paragraph indicates that a planning approval would not occur unless it meant that the public rights of way network would be safeguarded, improved or added to. Clearly, the City Council has made a decision which conflicts with its own stated policy, making it illegitimate and subject to a need for reversal.

Item 17, pp3-4. Similar to the previous item, notions of connected public rights of way depend upon protecting such rights of way rather than undermining them, against the Council’s own policies, as has occurred in this case.

Item 19, p. 4. Diversion means away from green space. This is against the public interest in having access to such space, as objectors have made very clear.

Item 20, p. 4. Conditions in the footpath at present, in winter and in warmer times of the year hardly give it a feel of being ‘urban in nature.’ This is misleading.

Item 22, p.4. As users of the footpath, we reject self-serving assumptions about the implausible advantages of diverting it.

Item 23, p.5. Footpath users value the footpath for its overall conditions, not just its particular designations. These comments are irrelevant.

Item 27, page 5. Remarks made in this document do not justify the idea that diversion of the footpath would have no ‘detrimental impact on the wider public rights of way network.’ This is fundamentally wrong. The quality of walking routes should be as ‘green’ as possible in all parts of any given footpath.

Item 35, page 7. This is emphatically not an ‘urban design’ issue. It is a sustainable transport issue from a CATG perspective since walking networks which are within green spaces should be retained as such. If not, then the notion of ‘Green Infrastructure’ in the highly flawed Oxford City Plan is meaningless.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Item 51, p.10: Planning permission 13/10555/CT3 has not been meaningfully ‘implemented.’ A token start has been made, no doubt due to the problematic character of foundation conditions on this site which threaten to burden the Council with excessive costs.

Items 63-68, pp12-13. We agree with objector comments on these topics and find the Council’s view on the issues raised to be without merit.

Item 69, p.13. Litter behind properties is an issue, regardless of the tenure of the homes concerned. The City certainly cannot guarantee its influence over new home users at Warren Crescent unless the homes are retained by its own company, or they would be subject to Right to Buy.

Item 72, p.14. Nothing in the documentation we have seen regarding FP80 or building homes on Warren Meadow indicates adequate concern for the retention of green space in the City. The City Plan envisages building on allotments, as an example of lack of care for green space; building on green space in Blackbird Leys has unleashed a storm of protest in recent weeks; proposed building on Redbridge Meadow and along Meadow Lane has done the same. From a CATG point of view, no one should feel they have to get into a car to get to a Green Space. But Green space building appears to be a preferred option of the Council at present. From a sustainability point of view, this is wholly inadequate; from a transport point of view, the traffic crowded City needs the Council to ensure new or retrofitted homes are car free by covenant to help reduce traffic levels over time. More generally, City support for Electronic Road Pricing is needed.[[4]](#footnote-4)

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1. Information in this section from Friends of Lye Valley. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See for example: <https://theecologist.org/2020/may/07/lockdown-rekindles-love-green-spaces> & <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/green-spaces-survey-reveals-changing-habits-of-public-during-lockdown/> & <https://www.cpre.org.uk/news/we-want-richer-green-spaces/> & <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52823058> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See a substantial critique of the Oxford City Plan under OTHER RELEVANT SUBMISSIONS at [www.catg.org.uk](http://www.catg.org.uk) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See our investigation of this for Oxford, under REPORTS at [www.catg.org.uk](http://www.catg.org.uk) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)