

An Open Letter to the University of Reading.

To Vice Chancellor Robert Van de Noort.

We the undersigned, wish to express our deep concerns regarding the proposed sale of land at Hall Farm, owned by the University, for development at Hall Farm. (See map below).

These plans are completely inconsistent with the four stated research themes of the University as set out below.

1. Agriculture, Food & Health – the Centre for Dairy Research at Hall Farm has been active for many years and whilst clearly the work of CEDAR could be transferred to another location it seems inherently wrong for the University to be closing such a facility at this time when security of food production and organic farming are high profile public issues.

2. Environment – As the University seeks to bring together “Reading’s world-leading strengths in research relating to the environment”, will selling off farmland not be providing an example of what has gone wrong as regards our custodianship of the environment? Would it not be better for the University to lead the way in environmental science?

Diversification of crop species, adding wildlife habitat to farmland, reducing soil tillage, and enriching soil with organic matter, to name but a few. With help from the university students, local schools, and the wider community this could present a genuine opportunity to return to traditional, healthier, more organic and nature friendly ways of farming.

The opportunity also exists to apply for grants from the Government under the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS).

3. Heritage & Creativity – As the university seeks on the one-hand to engage with the local community, it does very little to encourage support from the surrounding settlements, that have already witnessed massive house building in recent years.

Learning through engagement in outdoor activities such as animal husbandry or growing plants for food is in large part missing from the education of school children in the wider Reading area due to a lack of suitable space.

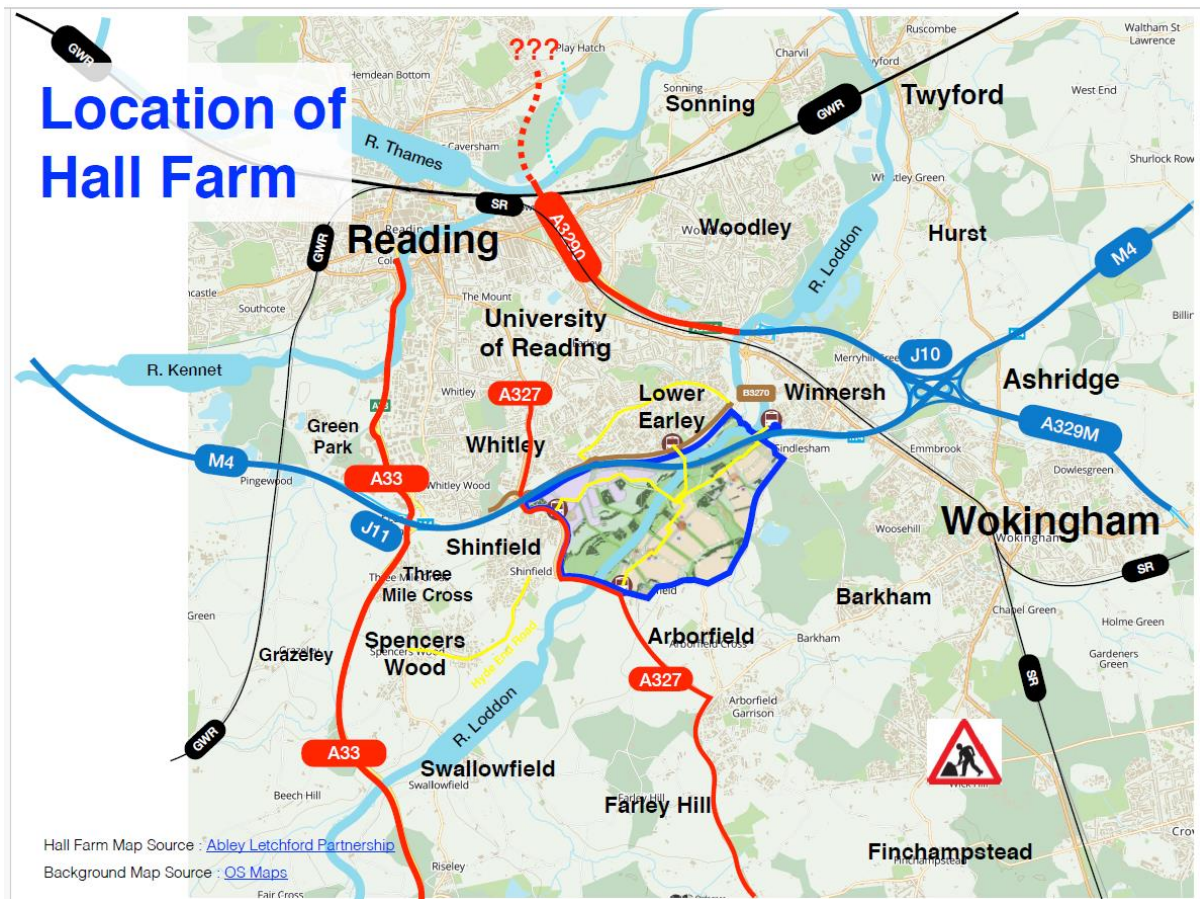
The social benefits of working outdoors are now more widely known and a scheme that encouraged involvement in nurture, care and growth could be of great benefit to the community.

4. Prosperity & Resilience. – It seems ironic that Housing and Cities is one of the main themes in this research area, yet rather than help provide new or radical solutions the University plans to stick to the model of the past few years of maximising profit to itself and the developers by cramming as many houses as possible onto a greenfield site.

The planned homes at Hall Farm will undoubtedly create wide ranging traffic problems, in an area already facing major traffic issues with little public transport infrastructure, including no train station.

Housing is clearly needed, locally for residents wishing to own their own home for example. But will these houses be truly affordable? If the University wishes to help accommodate people in their own homes, might it not be better to start at the very bottom rung of the housing ladder? By providing affordable student accommodation, either for purchase or to rent, more houses currently used as flats around the University area could be returned to the local property market.

In summary, we the undersigned call upon the University of Reading to reconsider the sale of farmland for housing on land at Hall Farm.



Signed _____

Date _____