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The Mission

The C.S. Lewis Foundation
inspires and equips Christians to
live out their faith in the world of
ideas and the arts.

The C.S. Lewis Foundation is a
not-for-profit, donor
supported 501(c)(3) tax-exempt
organization

C.S. Lewis Foundation
The Kilns
Lewis Close
Oxford, OX3 8JD

Planning & Conservation
Oxford City Council
Town Hall, St Aldates Chambers
109-113 St Aldates
Oxford, OX1 1BX

Re: Planning Application 16/02549FL – Land Adjacent to 4 Wychwood Lane, Oxford, OX3 8HG – Erection of 9 Apartments with Ancillary Facilities and 22-Car Parking Spaces Accessed from Lewis Close.

14 November 2016

Dear Oxford City Council Members,

I am writing on behalf of the C.S. Foundation UK in reference to the above referenced building plans proposed for the end of Wychwood Lane and Lewis Close, Oxford OX3 8JD. The Foundation owns The Kilns, the former beloved home of Oxford author C.S. Lewis. Mr. Lewis, his brother Major Warren Lewis, and Mrs. Moore owned the nearly ten acres of land on which the entirety of present day Lewis Close has been built. The home and property was purchased to serve as a sanctuary, removed from the fast paced life of Oxford City proper.

Not long after purchasing The Kilns, WWII descended upon the nation and, while his brother, Major Warren Lewis, rejoined the army, the famous author served in the Home Guard, travelling by train to speak in support of troops heading out to the front lines and presenting messages of hope on BBC radio. Even then, curious tourists and housing developments began encroaching upon the borders of the property. After his brother's death on 22 November 1963, Major Warren Lewis began selling off sections of the property to cover expenses. He clearly stipulated, however, that no more than one home could be built on each parcel in order that the peace and quiet of the area, and especially of what is now called the C.S. Lewis Nature Reserve, be preserved.

Lest we forget, Henry and Dora Stephen originally purchased the public Nature Reserve area from Major Lewis, and it was their generous donation of the property to BBOWT, with the stipulation of preserving the wildlife and tranquility of the area, that makes this property so important today. We currently have school groups of primary age arriving in groups of 30 to 90 to enjoy walking around the pond, pond dipping, examining various trees and birds and, of course, peeking into the WWII bomb shelter which C.S. Lewis built for the evacuee children from London who lived in his home. We have

personally witnessed some of those children returning to see the home, visiting the Nature Reserve where they once played, and of which they, and the Nature Reserve, became the inspiration for some of the greatest fictional works of the era, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Members of BBOWT have taken our Warden on private tours of the Nature Reserve to point out the trees that C.S. Lewis planted, as he loved to roam the woods and “play in the dirt,” introducing a variety of trees, his brother even introducing bamboo into the pond area (which was later removed), brought all the way from his wartime station in Shanghai.

Many in the community of Risinghurst, and especially those living on Lewis Close, have worked hard for many years in order to preserve the peacefulness of the area. No coaches are permitted to enter Lewis Close so that the groups of playful children can come running down the street without a care, and experience the quiet beauty of the Reserve. In the words of BBOWT, “This reserve has given many children their first wildlife ‘experience’ and is said to have inspired the Narnia classics” (Brochure). BBOWT also connects with school Watch groups in support of the Reserve and thus, “This tranquil woodland and large pond not only attracts children interested in its literary associations, but has been used for field study trips since 1969.... The pond is a flooded Victorian clay pit filled with aquatic plants, migrating toads, fascinating displays of dragonflies, moorhens, coots, and a woodland canopy of beech, oak, birch, alder, ash and hawthorn” (BBOWT website). The variety of trees is, of course, from Mr. Lewis’ own hand.


The Kilns welcomes children, families, and school groups, but also connects with tour groups from the Oxford Visitor Centre, as well as many other tour groups from around the world, offering the experience of viewing the historic Blue Plaque home. Volunteers, who arrived every summer from 1993 to 2002, lovingly restored The Kilns over a nine-year period. Those volunteers represented the parish community of Risinghurst, Holy Trinity Parish Church, as well as people of all ages from multiple countries. People willingly gave of their time and funds to restore the home to represent the 1930s–1950s time period when the Lewis brothers occupied the home. The Kilns is also regularly represented with Oxford Open Doors.

Even the stepson of C.S. Lewis, Douglas Gresham, who came with his mother, the poet Joy Davidman, who married C.S. Lewis and lived at the Kilns, put in time during the restoration, and often visits The Kilns during the year to reminisce and surprise tourists with his iconic stories. He, too, is shocked by this proposal. A recent *Oxford Times* article reports: “... Doug Gresham says he has been shocked by a scheme to build sheltered accommodations in Risinghurst, with an access road running past The Kilns and its neighbouring nature park” (2013). Ironically, the scheme was initially proposed at the very same time that C.S. Lewis was being honored at Westminster Abbey with the placement of a memorial plaque in his honor in its legendary “Poet’s Corner.” Whilst the BBC and other TV and radio crews were conducting interviews of former evacuee children, family members, and scholars at The Kilns, a threat to the very historic essence of the community was being crafted behind the scenes by Jonathan Beecher, with the active support of Charles Bull, owner of 7 Lewis Close.

The *Oxford Times* sums it up nicely: “Mr. Beecher wants to build units of sheltered housing along with a music room. The two-storey buildings would overlook the woodland and lake, with an access road running past the CS Lewis house and crossing the garden of the neighboring property. Dr. Deborah Higgins, resident warden of the house, said, ‘It would damage the neighbourhood. Having a major through road to 10 buildings would mean **traffic** cutting through. It would change everything.’” Mr. Gresham declared: “This should not be allowed to happen. It has always been a quiet road. This proposal would have the effect of putting the CS Lewis house in the middle of a development that it does not belong to....It would destroy what is a quiet cul-de-sac, and what for many is a holy retreat, for the sake of a profit grab idea.”

We appeal to you not only to protect the beautiful and beloved C.S. Lewis woodland reserve and nearby Blue Plaque historic home on Lewis Close, but also to honour the two brothers, C.S. Lewis, who was wounded in action in WWI, and his brother, Major Warren Lewis, who fought in both wars. Beyond this, we urge you not to forget the countless people, worldwide, from Europe, Asia, and North America, who visit the area, not only in remembrance of this historic treasure, but also to enjoy the tranquility found in the Nature Reserve.

On behalf of the C.S. Lewis Foundation UK, its worldwide constituency, and our much respected neighbors, we urge you to act now to preserve our rich legacy by denying approval of this most aggressive and egregiously offensive development proposal.



J. Stanley Mattson, Ph.D.
President & Managing Director