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28 April 2013

Councillor James Alexander, Leader
City of York Council 2013
West Offices,
Station Rise,
York, YO1 6GA

Dear Councillor Alexander,

Germany Beck and the Probable Site of the Battle of Fulford 1066

I am writing to you as Chairman of the Battlefields Trust, a national charity dedicated to the preservation, interpretation and presentation of battlefields as a historical and educational resource (see www.battlefieldstrust.com), about the decision taken on 25 April 2013 by York City Council to approve the construction of houses on the Germany Beck site at Fulford, the probable location of the 1066 battle there.

Fulford is the forgotten battle of 1066 and is often taken to be of minor significance. This is not the case. The failure of the Anglo-Saxons to overcome the Norse army at Fulford required King Harold to march north and defeat the Scandinavian invaders at Stamford Bridge. This depleted and exhausted Harold's army to such an extent that it failed to prevail at the battle of Hastings, heralding Norman rule in England. The battle of Fulford is therefore a vital part of the history and development of our nation. Moreover medieval battlefields from this period where the location is generally known are small in number and represent rare archaeological potential in helping understand how warfare was conducted at this time. Development at Germany Beck risks reducing this resource by 25 percent.

The Battlefields Trust has been following developments at Fulford closely. It was satisfied that the evidence in support of the application to have the battlefield registered by the Fulford Battlefield Society would be carefully assessed by English Heritage and its Battlefields Panel. In the event the application was refused on the grounds that the battle was not sufficiently securely located. The Trust understands English Heritage's reasons for coming to this decision in so far as the inclusion of unsecure sites on the register potentially raises questions about the credibility of other designations, increasing risks to battlefields generally.

However, the fact remains that Germany Beck is the most likely location for the battle to have taken place and the Trust's understanding is that English Heritage is reviewing the earlier Battlefield Panel decision. In these circumstances the Trust judges it was premature for York City Council to give planning permission for the Germany Beck site and that more time should have been provided both to allow for the completion of English Heritage's deliberations and for further investigation of the archaeology already found on the probable battlefield site.

The Trust recognises, however, that York City Council took its decision on the information available at the time and that there is little prospect of re-opening this decision. However, if the Council has not already issued its planning consent, I would ask that you delay this until English Heritage has completed its review as this might result in a change to the material facts of the case. If this is not feasible, and in any case, I judge it important that, as far as possible, there is mitigation in place to ensure that any extant battlefield archaeology is fully recorded. I note that condition 12 of the outline planning permission (01/01315/OUT) provided for a pre-development metal detecting survey and for an ongoing programme of archaeological supervision as development proceeds. I am therefore writing to ask that a specialist battlefield archaeologist is included within any team involved in the metal detecting survey and supervisory work as the Trust's experience is that general consulting archaeology companies rarely have the expertise to undertake the necessary work or interpret the results correctly.

I am copying this letter to Ms Kersten England, Mr Charles Jones of the Fulford Battlefield Society, Mr Nick Bridgland and Ms Tiva Montablanco, both of English Heritage.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Baldwin

Frank Baldwin
Chair
Battlefields Trust
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