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The Planning Inspectorate

COMMENTS ON CASE (Online Version)

Please note that comments about this case need to be made within the timetable. This can be found in the notification letter sent by the local planning authority or the start date letter. Comments submitted after the deadline may be considered invalid and returned to sender.

Appeal Reference: APP/C1435/W/23/3321978

DETAILS OF THE CASE

Appeal Reference	APP/C1435/W/23/3321978
Appeal By	GLEESON LAND AND JOHN ALISON LAND AND RESEARCH LTD
Site Address	Land at Downlands Farm Uckfield TN22 3PU Grid Ref Easting: 546619 Grid Ref Northing: 122026

SENDER DETAILS

Name	[redacted]
Address	[redacted]

ABOUT YOUR COMMENTS

In what capacity do you wish to make representations on this case?

- ☐ Appellant
- ☐ Agent
- ☑ Interested Party / Person
- ☐ Land Owner
- ☐ Rule 6 (6)

What kind of representation are you making?

- ☐ Final Comments
- ☐ Proof of Evidence
- ☐ Statement
- ☐ Statement of Common Ground
- ☑ Interested Party/Person Correspondence
- ☐ Other

YOUR COMMENTS ON THE CASE

Objection to Planning Application WD/2022/1637/MEA Downlands Farm

I writing to register my objection to the Planning Application WD/2022/1637/MEA Downlands Farm Uckfield

I am a resident of Snatts Road and I live almost directly opposite the planned SANGs carpark location. I moved to my current address in 2012 and I regularly enjoy the beauty of Lake Wood and the surrounding fields and areas and ancient woodland. My choice of a place to live was to do with being able to enjoy this tranquil place of beauty and to live in a small town with access to unspoilt green spaces. But this is not just an objection on personal grounds, my concerns are much bigger than that.

This land was under threat just prior to my moving and I was aware of it as I lived in Nutley before and had friends in Uckfield. In 2009 planning was refused and, after a detailed planning enquiry the conclusion was that this land should never be built on. This was decided at the highest level of government. Nothing has changed at all since 2009. Downlands Farm is still surrounded by ancient woodland and the local wildlife has thrived in the intervening years.

Direct Impact
As mentioned, I live on Snatts Road, which despite its name, is not a road. It is a single-track lane with no road markings, very few street lights and a foot path along less than 50% of one side. The lane is dangerous at the best of times as drivers use it as a rat run to avoid the town, and on the occasions where Church street is closed the traffic increases substantially. The lane is a long bend and, as I have no access to off road parking and, as well as myself and my immediate neighbours, people often park on our stretch of the road to walk in the woods, I have regularly seen and heard drivers having to do an emergency stop as it is impossible to see drivers approaching from the other direction. I have already witnessed one serious accident and almost all of my neighbours, myself included have had damage sustained to our cars due to the narrowness of the lane. This will only increase if a carpark and SANGS is developed with access off of Snatts Road. Once the car park is full, more people will park on the road. It is estimated that there will be an increase of 6000-7000 cars per month which will increase the possibility of a child being killed or injured whilst crossing or a serious car accident happening. This is not including the increase noise and pollution for the residents and for the surrounding woods and wildlife. Car parks also bring antisocial behaving (drug taking and dogging are common occurrences in rural unlocked car parks) In fact there is no need for a car park. The woods and grasslands are accessible by walking. We should be encouraging people to walk and not drive.

Environmental Impact
Wildlife
It is a fact that Downlands Farm and Lake Wood are home to a wide variety of wildlife. Many of which I have seen myself. 70 species of birds, kingfishers, skylarks, foxes, dormice, deer (I have seen deer walking down the lane and into the woods), voles, badgers, hedgehogs, and shrews. I could go on. 14 species of dragonfly and over 150 species of moths and butterflies, including Convolvulus Hawkmoth and Red Underwing moth, have also been identified as well as the endangered hazel dormice, and bats such as the Barbastelle bats. The ponds, which are of SSSI quality are home to rare invertebrates and reptiles and they thrive due to the inbroken wildlife corridor between Lake Wood and the medieval Malling Budletts Common. We need to conserve these special areas and the wildlife they support, not just for us but for future generations. These are accessible natural spaces which, with the construction of over 400 houses and the roads that go with that plus a manmade SANGS, will be lost forever.
Landscape
Downlands Farm site consists of field formed from old grass and hay meadows. It is surrounded by irreplaceable ancient woodland (some unrecorded and therefore ignored by the planning application), rare wet woodland, and sandstone rock outcrops. There is also a system of ghylls/headwater streams and rivulets that form a freshwater ecosystem and flow into Shortbridge Stream. This stream is part of the migration stream for UN critically endangered European Eels as well as a trout spawning habitat. Lake Wood is fed from these fields through sandstone and peat (peat is now becoming rarer than ever) and this is what gives this rare peat fed lake its black colour. You can see from the enclosed photo that

the fields are topographically higher than the lake and any development will seriously impact the Lake Wood Woodland Trust Nature reserve as well as the surrounding waterways.

The planning application suggests that the fields are 'low level agriculture'. A habitats survey should be done as , Budletts has U1, U4, M23A, M24, acid grassland, heathlands which are part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, Priority Habitats which was produced in 2008. after the original 2007 application and I can't see any reference to it for this application.
History
As well as the environmental impact this development will also put at risk a piece of Uckfield History. I refer to the carriage drive that's dates back to the 1790 and ran from Lake Wood to Malling Budletts Common, taking in the Mesolithic shelters, lake and stunning woodland.
Highways impact
In addition to the impact this development will have on Snatts Road for me and other residents, there is also the impact on the environment and Lake Wood and the ancient woodland found on the site by the plan to build a new roundabout to access the site from the A22 by-pass.
They will be destroying antient woodland to create the road. Photographic evidence clearly shows this. This roundabout will destroy this ancient woodland and impact on the biodiversity in this area. It is in the NPPF and Defra May 2022 Policy and Standing Advice on Ancient Woodland that development should AVOID harm or loss. The proposed roundabout will come through unrecorded ancient woodland and, as mentioned before, the fields are higher than Lake Wood and it needs the surface and groundwater to remain unchanged. I also believe that the plans have underestimated the size of the roundabout and splays. Owlsbury roundabout gives a good indication of the size and scope of such a roundabout with 215m visibility splays each side.
Also, this road is already busy during rush hour and another roundabout will add to already longer journeys and increase pollution in the area.

Then there is the plan to bring a cycle path out at the junction at the end of Snatts Road/Rock Road. This cannot be a serious consideration. The junction here is fraught with peril. Visibility of traffic coming from the right if you are turning out of Snatts Road is zero. And It's a difficult right turn into Snatts Road. Any cyclist or pedestrian would be in serious danger trying to navigate that junction.

Local Plan and other impact
Downlands farm is not listed at local council or government level as one of the many suggested pieces of land recommended for potential development. One of the key attractions of Uckfield is Lake Wood and it's outstanding natural beauty. The biodiversity net gain is not proportionate to the loss, harm and deterioration of an ancient woodland system connected between Lake Wood and Budletts Common and the area is listed as a Biodiversity opportunity area and there is an opportunity to continue to learn from this area.

It was reported In November 2021 that there are 238,306 properties classed as long term empty homes in the UK. The Sussex Express wrote an article stating that Chichester district council has 468,000 unoccupied, unfurnished homes; that Horsham Council are looking to fill 350 empty properties; that Hastings has more than 805 properties that have been empty for more than 6 months. Here, in Uckfield, we have the Ridgewood development with 1500 houses that is currently halted due to lack of interest. How many buildings do we already have in Uckfield that we can repurpose? The carbon footprint of a new home is 80 Tonnes of C02 (equivent to building 5 brand new cars) whereas refurbishing an old house carries a carbon footprint of just 8 Tonnes, -90% less impact.

Additionally, there is no plan for infrastructure, I have friends with children who cannot get into the same school so parents have to ferry them to schools further away. There is no plan to upgrade the Uckfield line for commuters, I have to travel 10 miles to my old dentist as I unable to get a dentist in Uckfield. Uckfield Talk on Facebook is littered with residents saying the same thing, not enough schools/dentists/doctors.

It also worrying that Wealden Council has had to push Southern Water to update and upgrade the sewage and water infrastructure system that cannot currently deal with existing sewage systems let

alone new developments.

National Impact/Environmental/Diversity and Impact for future generations
It is daily news about the impact we are having on our environment, climate change, loss of bees etc etc, the list is long, and that we are at a point of no return. We must do our part to act now, to make a difference, to secure our children's future by saving this special site. I want future generations to be able to enjoy what I have been able to enjoy, natural landscape, natural wildlife. not some developer's notion of a 'suitable accessible green site.' The site is already suitable, accessible and green. If you say yes to this, where will it end. Building on the Ashdown Forest? The 7km ring no longer exists.

Please, please say NO to this and put a stop to this forever. Save our beautiful green woodlands/clear streams/diverse wildlife for us and future generations. One step towards saving our planet.