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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]
Company/Group/Organisation Name	Maresfield Conservation Group

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

For the Attention of The Planning Inspectorate.

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

Maresfield Conservation Group submission in relation to the appeal against Wealden District Council's refusal to permit the construction of 424 houses at Downlands Farm, East Sussex.

Dear sir or madam,

I am writing both in my capacity as a resident of Maresfield and as a member of the Maresfield Conservation Group (MCG) committee to respectfully ask that the appeal to build 424 houses at the site known as Downlands Farm is rejected.

The MCG is a registered charity set up in 1991 with the aim of preserving village life and protecting the village of Maresfield from unnecessary and unwanted development.

We have found ourselves being increasingly tasked by concerned residents of the village and now surrounding areas to assist when it comes to objecting to a number of large developments that are being submitted by developers and landowners, who we know are taking advantage of the lack of a Wealden housing local plan.

In this submission we will confine ourselves to two key areas of concern. We know others share these views and others will highlight their own concerns. We also respectfully draw your attention to policy and legislation that we believe have relevance in this case.

Traffic:
The one thing that these large developments have in common is that during the construction phases, and once the properties are built, the amount of traffic will significantly increase to a level that will we believe have a negative impact on the village of Maresfield. School Hill/Hight Street is increasingly being used as a short cut by residents of Buxted, Ringles Cross and North Uckfield seeking to access the A22 to Nutley in order to avoid using the the by-pass. A development of this magnitude will only force more and more road users through the village as they seek to avoid the inevitable build up of traffic, on what is already an inadequate road structure. The areas of Snatts Road and London Road are going to become extremely congested and this traffic will inevitably pass through the centre of Maresfield as it joins the A22.

School Hill / High Street have a significant number of listed building, many of these are single glazed, the noise and vibration as a result of the inevitable increase in traffic will only exacerbate what is becoming an increasing problem for us.

We suggest the cumulative impact of recently approved applications in the surrounding areas of Buxted, Coopers Green, Ringles Cross and North Uckfield are a significant factor when it comes to traffic numbers, especially when as mentioned above the tendency for London Road / School Hill to be used as a short cut to the A22 towards Nutley.

Ecology:
This proposed development runs adjacent to Shortbridge Stream. This stream runs through Maresfield, under the bypass and on ancient woodland adjacent to the proposed development.

Shortbridge Stream is a Water Framework Directive EU designated salmonid and cyprinid site. In addition there is rare wet woodland at Butchers Wood which is situated close to the proposed development site, as is Lake Wood a significant local wildlife and local geological site. Shortbridge Stream is connected to both of these sites. Further upstream it is connected to the Ashdown Forest.

The impact by domestic animals, in particular cats, pose a significant risk to the wildlife along the banks of the stream and to the habitat and wildlife that have existed for hundreds if not thousands of years. This development will add to this risk, and will in our opinion destroy the fragile ecosystem that exists.

The Environment Agency had, up to 2019, been monitoring Shortbridge Stream for water quality and habitat. Sadly, this hasn't taken place over the last couple of years whereas it had been an almost annual event up to 2019. We suggest another survey is carried out to monitor the health of the stream as soon as possible.

We are aware that rare water voles were discovered during surveys connected to the recent Downland Farm application.

The view from the conservation area within Maresfield will be directly and negatively impacted if this development goes ahead. What are currently views of woodland and fields will be replaced by modern buildings and streetlights, all of which will have a detrimental impact on the conservation area of the village.

Policy and legislation:
We submit that National Policy Planning Framework 15 para 174 a, b, d and e apply to this application, and that significant parts of the rest of this section also apply, as do many other sections of the NPPF, including paragraphs 179 and 185, all of which we are sure are familiar to those involved in this process and who are more qualified to speak on this matter.

We draw the Planning Inspectors attention to the Blue Infrastructure map and suggest the implications for the surrounding area are clear to see, and submit that presumption in favour of sustained development does not apply in this case.

Saved Policy states under
EN8 – Low Weald: "Development within the Low Weald will only be permitted if it conserves the low rolling agricultural character of the landscape. In considering any proposal, particular regard will be had to:
1) Areas of unspoilt or remote countryside
2) The setting of settlements
3) Areas on the fringe of adjacent statutorily designated landscapes
4) The retention of woods, boundary trees and hedges
5) Attractive vernacular buildings and groups of buildings"

EN17 prevents development between Uckfield and Maresfield if it reduces the countryside gap, which we submit this development does.

In the WDC Adopted Local Plan at it states at 19.24.13:
"The development boundary excludes a number of properties along London Road, in order to prevent an intensification of ribbon development.
Further south, planning permission has been granted for a petrol filling station and restaurant to the north of the Uckfield and Maresfield Bypass junction, but the
Council has resisted further proposals for development in this open countryside area. In order to protect the landscape and prevent the coalescence of Uckfield and
Maresfield, as recognised in the County Structure Plan."

Conclusion

There are in excess of 9000 approved building applications within Wealden. Of these, something in the region of 7000 are yet to be "built out" of these 1600 have been approved for the Uckfield, Buxted and Maresfield areas and are yet to be built. We submit that once those are built and the current housing need is established, preferably by residents, only then should developers be invited to submit their applications. We would go further and say the area doesn't need this development.

We understand that Taylor Wimpey have "paused further development" of the nearby Ridgewood Place site, due in part in not being able to sell a significant number of houses built in their first phase of development.

We suggest that this application is another example of landowners and developers seeking to take advantage of Wealden's inability to agree a housing plan.

We note that this is the second occasion this application has been before the Planning Inspectorate and suggest that this is another example of developers pressing on with appeals ahead regardless of the cost to the public purse.

We urge you to reject this appeal and refuse permission for this destructive development to go ahead.

Respectfully submitted for your consideration.

[redacted]

on behalf of the Maresfield Conservation Group