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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

STATEMENT

My Name is [redacted] and I have lived in Uckfield for 30 years. I live with my husband and 3 children.

I have extensive local knowledge of Uckfield, the Appeal site and its surroundings. My Statement relates to the shortcomings of the sustainable measures proposed in the development with particular reference to the provisions for cycling and walking.

The distance from our house to Uckfield Town Centre is similar to the distance between the Downlands appeal site and the gradient along London Road, Church Street and other parts of the route between Downlands and the town centre is similar walking and cycling.

Before having children I out-commuted by driving with a range of travel destinations mostly centred around Brighton, Burgess Hill, the South East, London and by plane driving across the Ashdown Forest to access Gatwick or Heathrow. I then became an out-commuting working mother. I am now a self-employed working mother.

Together with my family I accessed many of Uckfield's key services including primary school, Uckfield College for secondary and sixth form provision, Freedom leisure services in both Uckfield and Crowborough, Maresfield gymnastics, tennis, swimming, fitness, cycling, rugby and other various after school clubs in or around the town, NHS health services, shops and other facilities as required.

As can be seen from the above, I have 30 years first hand experience of living, working and raising a family from a home within the Downlands area in North of Uckfield, first without family commitments with a corporate career, and then being a working mother with a young family and now as a self-employed mother with three older children as the family has grown up with a child just finishing GCSE's and continuing at Uckfield College sixth form (20 years of education provision in Uckfield so far)

I also know the surrounding area well, having often walked for leisure purposes at Ashdown Forest, along the footpath to Snatts Road, along the footpath of the Downlands fields linking the Uck 1/1 footpath to Lake Wood, along the footpaths at Budletts Common to Maresfield, and having walked many times to Lake Wood using the same route from Uck1/1 to Lake Wood over the years since living here in the 1990s.. As a family we tried to use our bicycles when we could but it was too dangerous around Uckfield and we drove to places like Seaford, Seven Sisters Cuckmere valley and Bedgebury. We have found we rarely walk to the town centre and the leisure centre. I should add that this is realistic as it is not possible to walk to recreation services, school or the town centre when you have to arrive by a set time meeting work and other commitments.

The hilly topography means it is not practical during a working or school week especially when you then add children and the hilly terrain of Uckfield into the equation and try to arrive on-time, meet other commitments and arrive in an orderly fashion. The woodlands, paths and fields are wet during winter which means they are often not usable when getting to school or work in a clean and presentable manner.

When I go into town, for 30 years, I see how few bicycles are regularly used for school, work and accessing the High Street. The hilly area, rural lanes, fast cars outside the 20mph zone, and the hilly High Street are not safe for family and friends cycling.

It is this knowledge and experience which I am using after reading and considering the proposed Downlands development.

As a working mother and parent in the immediate area, I feel walking, cycling and use of public transport will still not be encouraged as modes of travel for a variety of journey purposes" I wish to

explain why in my view the Appellant's attempt to secure a "modal-shift" to non-car modes of transport especially walking and cycling is not likely to be successful as planned and hoped for. Even though the provision for cycling and walking is proposed these will not be sufficient to discourage the use of the car in this location, the locations offered are unsustainable and unsuitable.

My experience of running a normal busy family is Uckfield for 30 years, who frequently endeavours to walk for pleasure leads me to the view that the scheme proposed by the Appellant at Downlands will not bring about a modal shift to cycling and walking but will instead promote a dependence on the car in this area of Uckfield and therefore this is not a sustainable development whilst creating environmental damage to the woodlands and Lake Wood which should be used for nature recovery between Lake Wood and the Buxted SSSI.

As a local resident, I am very concerned about the Downlands Farm's negative impact on the landscape setting of both Uckfield and Maresfield, the countryside, the ancient woodlands and amenities. I also set out my concerns as to the very significant ecological impact; the negative impact on the wider community; the lack of suitability for the area for the proposed use; the impact on the character and appearance of the area; the increase in noise and disturbance to Lake Wood and the woodlands; the proposed roundabout disturbing the woodlands, bus access and two car parks;

DETAILED COMMENTS

I do not believe that the proposed development relates to Uckfield or Maresfield in a sustainable way, or that the access arrangements will enhance accessibility to the town, or within the development itself.

Uckfield and Maresfield residents already know that our roads are difficult and that the town centre and bypass has reached its carrying capacity.

The proposed cycle path with Rocks Road and intersection with Snatts Road is dangerous and ill conceived. When the Inspector stands at locations round town you will quickly see that the difficult terrain and busy roads, Rocks Road lane and Snatts Road are narrow, with sweeping bends, a hill which traffic speeds up towards a blind bend and woodland with a steep gradient. There is a steep gradient up from Downlands, a steep gradient back down towards Rocks Park and a steep gradient back up again to Uckfield. In my view the perception that Snatts Road is dangerous and the gradients involved are all factors which will make the proposed route unattractive to young families. It is not safe now to try and cross Snatts Road or Rocks Road with children on bicycles and to suggest this is possible shows a lack of knowledge of this area. With one of our town's Uckfield College sixth form students being knocked down by a car in North Uckfield, our town is surrounded by a volume of traffic already. The time to see our town is when it takes 45 minutes or so to go from one end to the other (north south, or south north) or the bypass moving from Little Horsted Roundabout to Budletts Roundabout at a crawl simply because there is so much traffic. Peak times and difficult times , or rain the town and bypass can barely move for cars. Then when cars can move outside of Uckfield; the speeds outside of peak times are fast and dangerous on the rural roads at 60-70mph. This modelling of data is not reflective of what is happening already, the capacity has been reached and thousands more homes granted to be built.

We ask for the new Green and Libdem alliance at District Council to be given time to release a new local plan , consult with Uckfield and surrounding villages on a masterplan for the area, which the previous incumbents had failed to do since 2013.

Church Street would be a rather tortuous route, narrows to normally be one car wide, and has a hilly steep gradient not suitable for most families with young children. It appears to end on the entrance to blind bends on Rocks Road, linking through ancient woodland and changing an ancient woodland to prove access to an estate , Rocks Road to Church Street is narrow and winding. All of these factors would in my view make the route unsafe and unattractive to residents of the appeal site.

On a separate point I should add that dedicated cycle paths which negatively affect strips of woodland and light previously unaffected stretches of countryside should not be encouraged or supported as we

appreciate our dark skies.

To try and promote families crossing Snatts Road, Rocks Road or using Church Street for cycling is promoting an accident waiting to happen. I certainly would never allow my young children to cycle on these roads. The proposals will undoubtedly encourage more traffic onto Snatts Road, thereby adding to the problem across North Uckfield, Ringles Cross and London Road (a fast road often speeding down past the pub - average speeds after peak times is often thought to be 60-70mph)

If the cyclist continued up Church Street this is dangerous as the road is not wide enough for cars and cyclists. This part of the road network is unattractive to cyclists because of the very close proximity of vehicles which often pass at speeds that make cyclists feel at risk.

Towards the end of Snatts Road there is no footpath on the Ringles Cross pub side, this section of road regularly floods in heavy rainfall as it has done for 30 years. It is very difficult crossing London Road at this point because of the offset crossroads, fast moving traffic and navigating the cross roads and narrowing road after Ringles Cross pub. This all leads to a perception that this junction is not safe and will deter walkers and cyclists.

Whatever the merits of the proposed travel plan in theory, the practicalities of family life mean that in this rural area (and I include Uckfield as a rural town), driving is unfortunately the norm. Our family does walk when time allows. The majority of parents I talk to use the car in very busy everyday lives. I do not in any way mean to criticise these parents; I am just pointing out that, as a rule, we use cars for all our day to day activities. Walking to work or school or clubs is not the normal in Uckfield, walking the dog is often to the Ashdown Forest as a preferable location , even with walking to beautiful Lake Wood so is Ashdown Forest for walking from this location it is easily accessible and very close. A SANGS would not prevent more walking from the proposed development of Downlands Farm.

A cycle path next to the busy A22 bypass is deeply questionable and I personally would not subject children to this unpleasant environment. If using this route on bicycle once leaving the bypass to return home the Downlands site is very hilly and this will deter regular use of the bicycle along this route.

Walking or cycling along the A22 is a long route to the town and an unpleasant environment as the bypass is very busy, factors which will encourage use of the car.

During term time I would estimate that the normal number of car journeys from and to our home is around 6 to 8 movements per day. During school holidays it is around 4 to 6 per day. So the rough average for our household is between 4 and 8 trips per day which I am sure will be similar for family households in this area and for Downlands. We now have 4 cars in our household, above the average due to reliance on the use of the car and the age of our children.

Access to a primary school is likely by car (Rocks Park primary school is normally over subscribed). Therefore, choice of primary school and Uckfield College will normally mean more cars coming from Downlands Farm to access education and drop off / pick up from the schools across the nearby area.

Choice of schools also encourages the use of the car as all other primary schools in the area are a drive away. This will all add to the in and out commuting to the site due to the options accorded by parental choice. Thereby adding extra traffic movements over and above those generated internally by the new housing.

Within Uckfield town centre, due to its congested nature and steep hill it is very rare that families cycle here. Even though we used to cycle as a family, we would not take our children cycling in Uckfield town centre due to the volume of cars, lack of room to manoeuvre, to keep safely away from cars and the gradients.

The distance and gradients for walking from Downlands to the Town Centre using either of the new pedestrian routes is ill conceived, will take too long and therefore further encourage the use of the car.

In 30 years I have rarely seen a family cycling from West Park or Rocks Park or around Uckfield and the villages or along the cycle track to Uckfield or Tesco.

The cycle routes do not provide a co-ordinated or integrated alternative for cyclists whilst damaging ancient woodlands to create said cycling paths.

As a family who frequently enjoy walking and used to cycle, we are closer to Uckfield than this proposed Downlands development, and know this area well and do not think the proposed walking and cycle routes are viable proposals. The steepness of the routes, particularly those crossing the site and Uckfield roads and the physical obstacles to level and straight routes, all militate against their practical use for the volume required on this number of proposed houses making this an unsustainable cycling and walking development.

This will especially be the case if both parents work, or they are on their way to another location, or they use pre-school facilities. Along with the various after school activities in and around the area for children these factors will also promote driving not walking, unfortunately this is a fact of life for this rural area. Whatever this 'modal shift' is speculated to achieve, in this area this will simply not happen with the best will in the world.

When my husband commuted to London depending on the time of his appointment and required travel flexibility he commuted via Buxted or via Haywards Heath. Buxted is already at over capacity in terms of parking and both railway stations users park in the nearby roads in both Uckfield and Buxted. If you commute you go for the least time consuming method and the majority from Downlands will therefore drive to the station and not catch a bus. Also, a significant proportion of the Downlands site residents who commute will probably commute from Buxted, exacerbating problems at Buxted too. The London train from Uckfield is a busy commuter line and many drive to Uckfield centre to park at Luxford car park to avoid paying for the station car park, then catch the train, especially driving in inclement weather (not every day is summer sunshine)

There is a bus service at the end of our drive and in 14 years we have not once used it due to the rural nature of Uckfield, family pressures, time or commuting. I cannot see that a bus service will provide much of an advantage to Downlands as I am sure many families will be like ourselves.

Much as I walk and cycle with our children where practical, over 20 years of primary and secondary educ