12th July 2023

Dear Sir

We are writing with our comments on the Appeal **ref APP/C1435/W/23/3321978.**

The Appeal does not address the fundamental problems facing Uckfield as a result of developers putting forward applications for hundreds of new houses for which there is both no demand, in the immediate area; and insufficient infrastructure to support the increase in population.

The amendments to this application are superficial and irrelevant. The impact of a development of this size in addition to other proposals still under consideration will have a disastrous effect on Uckfield in terms of pressure on health, education and social services. Essentially there is no social component to any of these proposals.

This unique site is unsuitable for development and should be part of the Government's new Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Given the number of other developments in the area, it is even more undesirable to sacrifice a rare and important habitat to unsuitable and unnecessary development.

We believe that this unique part of the High Weald landscape is worthy of SSSI status and should be preserved for its internationally significant Geodiversity.

Previous applications for the site of Downlands Farm have been refused, including one following a major public enquiry in 2009 which found that the site was unsuitable for housing. This area has never been zoned for development in the Local Plan, and we believe that the previous reasons for the refusal of applications still apply and are now even more relevant.

We support Natural England's comments on the original application and note from the Appeal documents Section 6, Statement of Case, that Natural England still has concerns regarding the wider proposals relating to ecological and landscape impacts and that they have requested further information, including justification for the use of pathways through ancient woodland. Natural England also refers to the need for further consideration of likely ecological impacts of the SANG before its acceptability can be determined.

The proposed development site is an important habitat for wildlife and is next to the Woodlands Trust Lake Wood Nature Reserve which supports a number of rare species. The Downlands Farm site has 50% irreplaceable ancient woodland, (examples of which have diminished and continue to be under threat) and 50% organically farmed fields. The site forms a natural wildlife corridor and green belt between Uckfield and Maresfield. The proposed new houses, access roads, roundabout, and parking spaces will break up the connectivity of this ancient woodland and wildlife corridors.

The proposed development would also increase the demand on the management of sewage (which is already under severe strain), with many instances of raw sewage discharges into local rivers during 2021. Any development of this site would add greatly to the strain on the systems for both fresh water and waste water. Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council have both declared a climate emergency and are focussing on the need for Wealden to be prepared for a prolonged drought or flooding. Given the current drought and the extreme temperatures in the

summer of 2022, the need to preserve and maintain this important green space with its ancient woodland which absorbs harmful carbon, is very important.

Although the Appellant has made a limited attempt to address concerns regarding biodiversity and rare wildlife habitats in its Appeal, no regard has been given to other important issues which are set out below:

- **Too many houses, exceeding local demand:** Maresfield Parish Council and Isfield Parish Council have objected on the grounds that the housing quota for Uckfield, established in the 2013 Core Strategy, has already been fully met; and other Parish Councils have objected on the grounds that no consideration has been given by the Appellant to the effect of this development on surrounding villages; and that the area is already overdeveloped with its existing infrastructure already unable to cope. According to CPRE, 367 homes have already been approved since 2020 and major applications for a total of 1,449 houses are waiting to be decided.

- **Employment:** The appeal refers to Uckfield having "the significant employment area of Bellbrook Industrial Estate". It also states that "The Town Centre has a wide variety of shops, including a Tesco Superstore and a Waitrose, a variety of cafes and restaurants, a cinema, and a Civic Centre."

  This overlooks the fact that in the High Street there are many empty shops, with several recent closures. In addition, over the past three years, three banks have closed (ie Barclays, NatWest and HSBC). One pharmacy closed last year and there is a potential threat to Boots' pharmacy. Given the large number of elderly residents this is already causing problems.

  We remain of the opinion that there is no demand for more housing in the immediate area and we do not accept that there are significant employment opportunities in the town.

- **Transport**: according to the Appeal: "2.7 The town boasts good public transport services including a centrally located bus station and rail station, providing connections to neighbouring towns …"

  The rail service to London is one train an hour. There are bus services to local towns but a great deal of travel is done by car with a great deal of traffic congestion already in the town and surrounding roads.

- **Increased road traffic**: over-development is already affecting Uckfield, Maresfield and the By-pass. Traffic through Uckfield High Street at peak morning and afternoon times is very heavy and often at a standstill.

- **Health:** the Appeal also refers to health facilities in Uckfield. There are two surgeries, *i.e.* The Meads Surgery and the Bird-in-Eye Surgery. Currently, a significant number of houses are being built on land adjacent to Uckfield Community Hospital, where Bird-in-Eye Surgery is located, which will lead to increased demand being placed on this Surgery.

The Appeal takes no account of the many large scale current developments and those about to start or which are at application stage. A number of large new developments within a mile of Ringles Cross are already proposed and there is an application (July 2023) for 16 new dwellings in Snatts Road (to replace the current manor house).

Snatts Road is a very busy road, used by lots of traffic wishing to avoid the main road to Uckfield High Street, which, as previously mentioned, is regularly congested. The proposed footpath and cycle track access to Rocks Road would be very dangerous. This is near the corner of Rocks Road and Snatts Road, neither of which has a footpath and are both hazardous for pedestrians and cyclists.

Many thanks in advance for taking our comments into consideration.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

For official use only (date received): 12/07/2023 19:40:34

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

COMMENT DOCUMENTS

The documents listed below were uploaded with this form:

Relates to Section: REPRESENTATION
Document Description: Your comments on the appeal.
File name: Comments on appeal 12072023.docx

PLEASE ENSURE THAT A COPY OF THIS SHEET IS ENCLOSED WHEN POSTING THE ABOVE DOCUMENTS TO US