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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

Re: App Ref: WD/2022/1637/MEA - Land at Downlands Farm, Nr TN22 2AR

Dear Mrs Turner,
I am a resident of Uckfield and am writing to offer my views on possible impacts of the proposed Downlands Farm development by Gleeson Strategic Land (hitherto GSL) on local residents, to help inform Wealden District Council's 'Direction of Travel' consultation.

I understand that GSL has submitted hybrid planning application to demolish existing dwellings and construct around 430 new residential dwellings at the Downlands Farm site alongside provision of vehicular, pedestrian and cycle access, emergency access and public open space, including a SANG.

Within the past five years that I have lived here, I have seen new developments in Uckfield town (Grants Hill Court, 67 properties), Harlands Park (119 properties in progress), Uckfield new town (9), Ridgewood (250 currently built and offered for sale, but permission has been granted for a total of 1000 homes) and other sites are either recently approved or tabled for approval, including Bird in Eye hill, Ridgewood house, Gladmans Eastbourne Road and Horstedpond Farm, all in addition to the GSL application. Such an extensive increase in new housing in Uckfield will create a significant increase in the local population (15,033 at the 2021 census) and produce an unacceptable strain on existing infrastructure, including local amenity usage, noise levels and traffic. If approved, during the Downlands development phase, there will surely be increased noise and 'demolition dust' dispersal, polluting the air, which will cause us all unnecessary distress. My specific concerns in regard to the Downlands farm proposal lie in the following areas:

Water supply and sewage removal
South East Water has already imposed a temporary use ban on Uckfield because, as the CEO, stated: 'Despite every available water treatment works and supply source operating 24/7 at maximum output, we could not treat water quickly enough to meet the pace of demand and therefore had to act'. There is simply insufficient treated water available to supply existing households in Uckfield. This situation will be considerably worsened as the new properties that are currently being released for sale, become inhabited.

Southern water must be asked for an evaluation of the impact of an additional 430 houses on the existing public sewer network. It states that it is building capacity and resilience at its wastewater treatment works to reduce pollution and flooding in an attempt to address its current failings. It is therefore possible that additional effluent flows in the immediate future could lead to an increased risk of foul flooding, and/or to untreated effluent being discharged into our local rivers and seas across the region. This practice is a national disgrace and one that must be addressed, rather than exacerbated through additional demands.

Transport
Uckfield has long been considered by locals to be a 'congestion hotspot'. In my experience, the A22 has become busier and noisier during the past five years, and there are limited alternative routes for use when accidents occur or roadworks take place. Indeed, we have seen local roads gridlocked on such occasions. This results in frustrated, angry drivers – and is not conducive to road safety or mental wellbeing. Snatt's road, which runs from the A22 through town and towards the A272, is often very busy with traffic, and will become more so with additional dwellings.

The rail system seems to be just about holding its own at the moment, with peak traffic footfall being just bearable. Further overcrowding of rail services, which are likely from an increased population, could make commuting unbearable.

Local amenities
High street shopping: Uckfield has two main supermarkets plus a Tesco Express, three dispensing chemists, one bank and two building societies, which serve not only Uckfield residents, but those coming from nearby local villages. Rather than seeing an increased provision for our already recently

increased population, we have seen the HSBC bank close and two valuable hardware shops close. The local supermarkets, chemists, the library and bank are already stretched to fulfil customer needs: it is not uncommon to find supermarket shelves empty of fresh vegetables and fruit by mid-afternoon, particularly on weekends!

Leisure provision: The one small cinema is satisfactory for now, but will not accommodate further town growth. The town swimming pool is under threat of closure due, it seems, to lack of funds.

Medical provision: At our current population level, we are unable to make an appointment to see our GP so it is difficult to see how the medical services, including the Community hospital, could manage to serve an even larger population. Many dental practices are similarly running close to capacity.

Schools: An increase in education provision will be badly needed to accommodate children from the existing approved developments, let alone those coming from proposed new developments, such as the GSL site, as this is already at capacity. Children will need to be transported to schools outside of Uckfield and this will inevitably further increase traffic congestion locally.

Utilities; Electricity supplies: There have been brief electricity outages, as well as broadband outages, in recent months, and we are warned that electricity outages will be increasingly likely during the coming winter due to increased demand. This can only be worsened by an increased population.

Local wildlife impacts
Impact on wildlife: Downlands Farm has been classified as ancient and semi-natural woodland, with some deciduous ancient woodland in Lake Wood. These are valuable local habitats for breeding birds, including sparrow hawks, red kites, woodpeckers, buzzards and owls. Mammals, such as hedgehogs, voles, badgers, foxes, deer, rabbits, harvest mice, dormice and bats all live there, as do amphibia and reptiles, such as frogs and slow worms, and a myriad of insects. Because Downlands Farm neighbours West Park Nature Reserve, managed by Uckfield council, Lake Wood, owned by the Woodland Trust and Buxted Park, a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), it is part of a vital wildlife corridor between these places and further afield.

Development of the Downlands Farm site will be likely to have knock-on adverse consequences for its neighbours: noise levels and light pollution will increase, disturbing local wildlife, and domestic animal incursions into neighbouring habitats could potentially result in the catching and killing resident birds, dormice, bats and herptiles.

Deciduous woodland and hedgerows are considered under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan as 'Priority Habitats', and, as such, it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that such habitats, are preserved and nurtured rather than buried under building construction. Preparing local nature recovery strategies is a statutory requirement under the Environment Act 2021. Key to such strategies is an outcome of improved local biodiversity with improvements in livelihoods of local residents.

The government's 25-year environment plan includes the following goals:
• achieving clean air through reduced emissions (roadside NO2, air particulates, greenhouse gases),
• having clean and plentiful water, partly through reducing damage abstraction of water from rivers and groundwater,
• achieving healthier soils, which will help improve air quality, greenhouse gas balance and water quality, which in turn will help mitigate climate change
• achieving a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife, partly through increasing woodland in England,
• reducing the risks of harm from environmental hazards, including making sure that decisions on land use, including development, reflect the level of current and future flood risk,
• enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment, and ensuring access to high-quality natural spaces to benefit the health and wellbeing of people, and
• minimising waste.

Additional dwellings in Uckfield will inevitably increase local emissions, reduce water supply, increase waste production, increase flood risk (including foul flood risk) and result in loss of valuable natural

habitats and open spaces, both for local wildlife and residents. GSL states that it will provide a SANG, something that will become mandatory from November 2023 for larger sites, such as Downlands Farm. SANG is an attempt to satisfy the UK government's requirement for new developments to produce a minimal net gain in biodiversity of 10% post-development, with the aim of protecting vulnerable or protected areas by attracting new residents to SANGs and away from vulnerable or protected areas. The government requires that SANGs must be funded and managed in perpetuity (80-125 years, currently). Not all landowners qualify to undertake this - does GSL qualify? Is there any evidence from previous building projects that SANG conditions have been, or could be, satisfied?

It is my opinion that the council has a duty of care to its residents and local wildlife to ensure that it meets its obligations in regard to the government 25-year plan and the Environment Act 2012. In this respect, I feel the council should help to protect our precious, valuable local woodlands and the adjacent SSSI and preserve wildlife corridors as well as encourage improvements in local biodiversity. The GSL proposals seem counter to these objectives to me.

I respectfully request, therefore, that the council does not approve GSL's hybrid planning application.

Kindest regards,
[redacted]