Objection to WD/2022/648/MAO Mockbeggars

Appreciating the unknown sandstone landscapes adjacent to Mockbeggars which are rich in geodiversity, archaeological and ecological environments:

The following information has only recently come to light and, in part, contradicts the response from Wealden District Council refuting the objections to WD/2022/648/MAO: 'however *it is apparent that by way of modern development the connections with the wider landscape have been lost'.* This may be true of the impact on known designated heritage assets, but once again not true of those undesignated assets, hitherto not having been assessed in this planning application. It also emphasises the importance of sites immediately adjacent to the planning application site being important ecological sites which serve to enhance the wildlife corridors. Much of which has apparently been dismissed by Wealden District Council as not being grounds for objection.

The following is yet another example of a collective failure to appreciate the rich and varied landscapes that are to be found north of Uckfield. In this instance the failure ranges from earlier biodiversity studies to map the Local Geological Sites that were identified in a project that ran for about ten years during the 1990s and early 2000s and all of the sites that were identified were subject to condition assessment surveys that took place between 2010 and 2012. 125 sites were identified then and there are currently no plans or capacity for any further designations to be made. Since this identification and designation process took place, some sites have been almost completely lost to development. An example of this is Keymer Tile Works (LGS: TQ31/61). The current landscape assessment done for this planning application fell short of comprehensive investigation together with a lack of local knowledge or understanding just how important this sandstone landscape is for history, archaeology, ecology, and biodiversity. Whilst the sites under discussion here are not under direct threat it is important that they are known about and fully understood.

A visit to Durrants (TQ475233) and Eagle Rock (TQ473233) on Thursday 2nd June 2023 showed that, adjacent to the Mockbeggars site are substantial Ardingly sandstone outcrops. Best visualised in the early Ordnance Survey Maps of 1908 and 1938 (Figures 1 & 2). These are massive sandstone outcrops with overhangs and splits in the sandstone rocks which are not dissimilar to those found locally at the Rocks nature reserve in Uckfield and slightly further afield at Eridge Rocks. No archaeological investigations have taken place here and the possibility of prehistoric, and more specifically Mesolithic activity is high, especially in those areas not subject to quarrying. No information on the quarrying that took place here has been found but the quarried landscape is a fascinating example of a surviving local sandstone quarry, quarried over time and later used as part of the 20th century garden (Figure 5). Elsewhere the rocks have been left untouched and are in their natural state (Figure 6).

Durrants, formerly known as the Warren, is an undesignated heritage asset, highly unusual, country house between Maresfield and Buxted in East Sussex *(Figure 3).* Built by local master builder Stanley Durrant, in sandstone on the site of a sandstone quarry in 1939, on completion the house was immediately requisitioned by the MoD and the large, flat roof was reinforced to support an anti-aircraft boufers gun for the duration of WWII. It lies above the fields at Mockbeggars and from the front and terrace of the house the development will be visible and the light pollution from the development will adversely affect the rich ecology which are to be found in such rare sandstone landscapes (Figure 4).

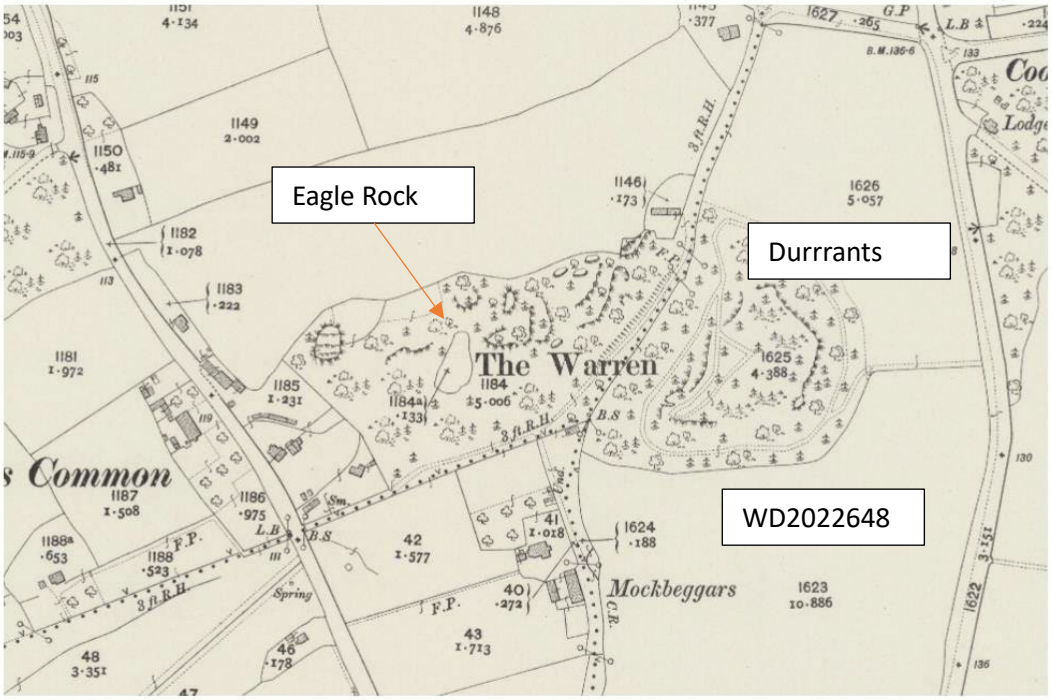


Figure 1 1908 map showing extent of rock outcrops adjacent to planning site

Durrants, formerly known as the Warren, was part of the Buxted Park Estate until it came up for sale in 1922, the land to the west, including Eagle Rocks, was along with Budletts part of the Streatfeild estate of Rocks Park.

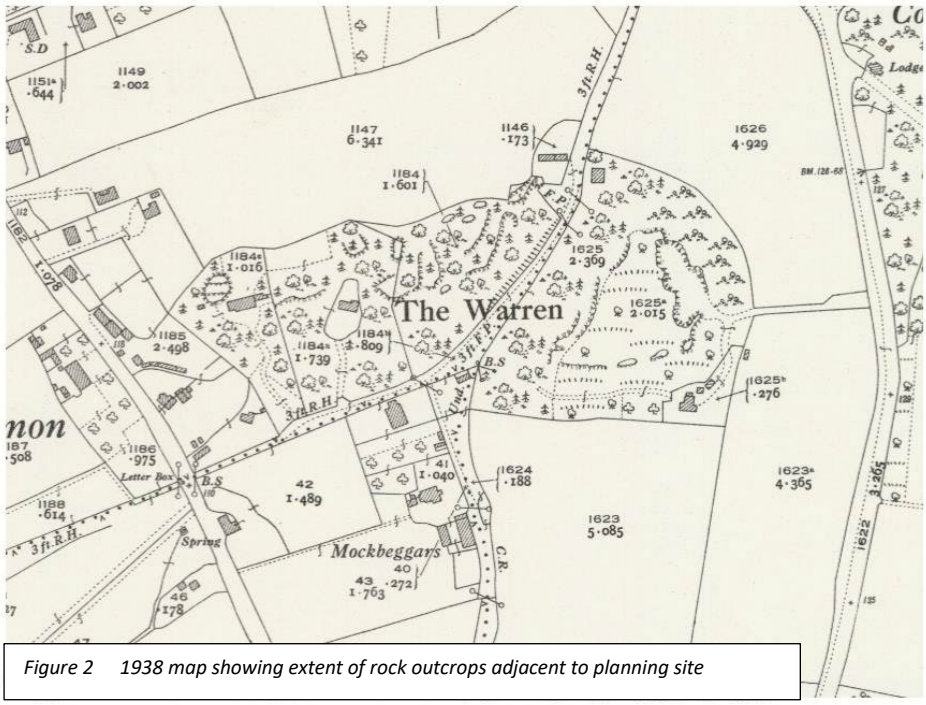


Figure 2 1938 map showing extent of rock outcrops adjacent to planning site



Figure 3 Durrant House



Figure 4 View from Durrants to Mockbeggars development field



Figure 5 Durrants quarry garden

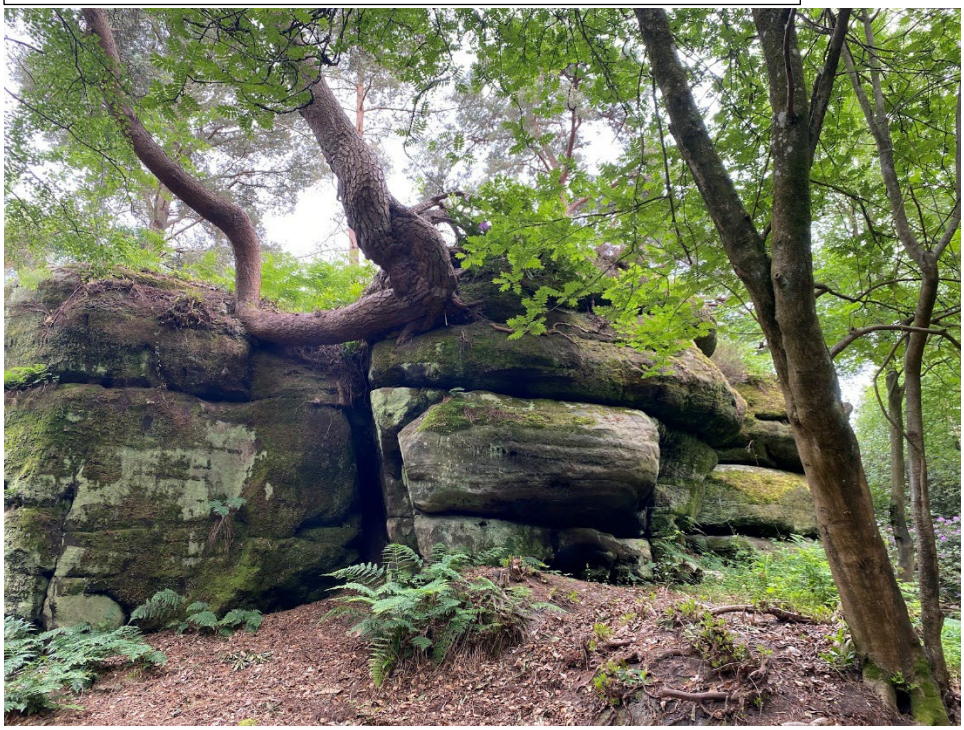


Figure 6 Potential Mesolithic rock shelters

The house at Eagle Rock is yet another undesignated heritage asset, albeit one dating from 1980. The construction of the in-situ slab, steel frame and suspended steel wings with its glazed roofs, heat pump and passive energy collection was undertaken by specialist contractors, while the insulated ply and double-glazed walling and all internal construction and finishes were by carried out by students from the AA School of Architecture, alongside Ian Ritchie Architects and Hanscomb QS. The entire project managed by Ian Ritchie Architects. It was completed in 1981. It has been owned for the last 3 decades by Andy Earl and Sophie. It sits surrounded by its own massive Ardingly sandstone outcrops, which, in this instance, has not been subject to quarrying. More sandstone outcrops are scattered through the area which was once just known as the Warren. There are prolific examples of graffiti encompassing a wide range of dates (Figure 7).



Figure 7 Graffiti, Eagle Rock

Whilst this assessment was written primarily from an historical and archaeological expertise It is a given that such unusual sandstone landscape, and relatively untouched by modern development would support a huge range of ecological diversity. It has been said that Beckstein and Barbastelle bats may be using this locality. A comprehensive bat survey should take place before Wealden District Council make the final decision on this development and acknowledge the overall importance of this nationally important area. Moreover, this geology supports a wide range of mosses, ferns and liverworts (Figure 8).



Figure 8 Example of filmy fern, Eagle Rock

Below is just a brief example of relevant policies which should protect such landscapes:

Geodiversity: The High Weald's sandrock outcrops are important geological features and support nationally rare ferns, mosses, liverworts and lichens, a living legacy from the climate most of Britain experienced around 4000 BC.

NCA122 NE508 provides the additional opportunity to
1: Protect and maintain the sandstone outcrops and other geological features of the High Weald to promote greater understanding of geodiversity and the contributions that they make to the cultural heritage of the area.

The Warren is now under conservation measures from the current owner.

However, in conclusion it is likely that:

The development would impact upon and fragment the local ecological network. Ref: National Planning Policy Framework 2021 sections 174 & 179 and Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan 2013 policy WCS12 Biodiversity.

From the outset the historic landscape assessment submitted by the developer has lacked information and Wealden, in seeking approval for this development to go ahead have dismissed the numerous ecological, hydrological and over-development concerns that have been submitted. This development should not go ahead in such sensitive site, nationally important site. All of the above information about this unusual geological site and how this has had an impact on the cultural, archaeological and ecological surroundings should be fed into the nascent Local Plan.

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