

Planning Inspectorate Public Inquiry

Former Wye College Site Planning Application Appeals A, B & C
Appeals submitted by Telereal Trilliam

Statement by Sue Powell, as an Interested Party (IP)
and on behalf of Wye Village Design Group

3rd February 2021

(Introduction & VDG)

MY name is Sue Powell. I have lived for 50 very happy years in Wye. My 4 children went to school here, and my late husband is buried here. This is my place, for which, along with countless others through the generations, I have a deep affection.

This same feeling prompted John Kemp, a son of Wye, later Archbishop of Canterbury, to expand the parish church and to give Wye its own grammar school (1447) the Latin School. Its teaching role was embedded in the life of the village from the very start and has continued almost unbroken for 570 years. The imposing west window in Wye church shows John Kemp holding the model of a building: Not as you might think the church, but the Latin School. He is flanked by windows showing hops being trained, sheep farming, fruit harvest and grain harvest. In other words, what began with the Latin school eventually became Wye College.

The church is the third party in this triangle of inter-dependence. The vicar of Wye was at any one time Chaplain to the College. Commem week services were of course held in the church, the congregation then walking out down the church path, past the Latin school to the reception in the College : walking, as it were, through the centuries.

The College was simply part of our social and economic life. Everyone, it seemed when I first arrived, was in some way connected to The College. I soon came to appreciate this interdependence and the richness it brought to the local community. One of my earliest memories is walking up to Swanley Hall to hear a lecture by Ernst Schumacher the author of the recent and groundbreaking book Small is Beautiful. This was education in its widest sense, free, open, and on my doorstep. Since then I have enjoyed being part of hundreds of other events in the old College, worshipped in the College chapel, sung Carols in the Old Hall, as many others have already attested to this Inquiry. The loss of all this is a profound loss for the entire community of Wye.

Wye remains a pro-active community that can articulate its concern for good design, and work to protect its local built heritage. I therefore joined the Village Design Group in 1997, when it was first formed. I worked alongside my friend the late Catha Keegan, to whom the Village Design Statement document is dedicated. Wye completed its VDS in 2000, one of the first in east Kent. The VDS now sits as an appendix in the Wye Neighbourhood Plan.

I am representing the VDG here today. It comprises knowledgeable residents together with respected design professionals in Architecture, Townscape Design, Landscape Design, Town Planning and Historic Buildings. All members of the group live or work in Wye Parish.

In September 2017 the VDG prepared and issued to ABC an illustrated Critical Position Paper on the draft TT Masterplan for WYE3 including the 3 sites that are the subject of this Inquiry.

(The lack of an agreed and adopted Masterplan)

The design context to these 3 applications is the broader WYE3 Masterplan. TT's attempt at this Masterplan is flawed in many ways, being more a collection of disparate, piecemeal site designs than a fully integrated Masterplan. It was not subjected to authentic consultation, evidenced by the fact that it was not significantly revised following the extensive, well informed comments made. Most crucially, it was produced **after** and not before TT's first proposals for residential conversion of the Grade I & Grade II buildings. These residential proposals therefore **prejudiced** the consideration of alternative proposals, the proper design exploration of alternative uses and their locations across the WYE3 sites. This should have been revised and updated during the Masterplan design and consultation process.

As raised by Wye PC at the time of the first historic building application, this fundamental error in strategic planning and process by TT, should have led to ABC **refusing the application on policy grounds**. This is because bringing forward the proposals in the absence of an adopted Masterplan conflicts with Policies WNP6 and WNP11 of the Wye Neighbourhood Plan.

The Ashford Local Plan 2030 intentionally defers to the WNP for specific Site policies in Wye and the final paragraph of WNP6.4 says..

It is essential that the WYE3 site is considered as a whole and that its redevelopment is the subject of an inclusive masterplan approach in the first instance and is compliant with Policy WNP11. Piecemeal applications should not come forward if they will prejudice an integrated solution for what is the major site for development in the village..

Regarding the TT Masterplan: My colleagues and I at the VDG consider that it lacks a clear strategic oversight or **any** strong ideas. It is not landscape led, which given the AONB location is unacceptable. The landscape plan is weak and follows rather than leads the shape of the development plots within it. There is also very little sense of place making or defined character areas that relate to the historic townscape of Wye or the AONB landscape setting.

There is little or no integration or mix of uses within development plots. There are very limited community facilities, social or leisure uses, that would be appropriate to accompany and enhance significant residential and commercial development.

In several areas the Masterplan morphology (meaning its footprint shape and pattern of development) is generic and suburban in character. It does not relate to the village morphology of Wye, that as explained in the VDS has clearly defined character areas, with buildings usually parallel and close to the edge of roadways and junctions to create highly legible, well defined public realm spaces. This is completely missing in the TT Masterplan and constituent site applications considered in Appeals B & C of this Inquiry.

(Appeal A - Historic Buildings)

Then for Appeal Site A, the VDG is **very** concerned with the TT proposals for both the Grade I & Grade II Listed Buildings. Whilst it is important to return these valuable buildings to beneficial use as soon as possible, it is also important that they are preserved and not substantially damaged in the process. The TT proposals **are** damaging to these buildings, as we set out in our 2017 paper. Also, their use over several centuries as educational semi-public buildings should be respected and significant public access to them should be continued.

There are in fact other more sympathetic uses that would have similar financial value, but much less conversion cost. They could therefore be more profitable and financially viable than the appellants proposals. These uses would also compliment and facilitate the community uses required by the WNP and promoted by the WyeCRAG group.

We therefore contend that the TT proposals are unimaginative and inappropriate in terms of design, development economics, architectural heritage, community value and planning policy.

Also by displacing entirely private residential use to these precious buildings, the proposals prejudice the consideration of other uses here and elsewhere across WYE3, that should have been properly explored and agreed beforehand in the Masterplan process.

(Pause)

The VDG is grateful to ABC's planning officer for referring to our previous design assessments in her evidence for Sites B & C. Moreover and for brevity today, I ask the Inspector to study the VDG Critical Position Paper dated Sept 2017, that remains largely relevant for **all 3** of the Appeal sites being considered now.

Today I will briefly supplement and update our VDG assessment from 2017 of the latest designs for Appeal Sites B & C as follows:

(Appeal B - Occupation Road)

For Appeal Site B at Occupation Road. The site proposals here present a generic, formulaic and unimaginative sub-urban layout. The design fails to echo the historic character of Wye or to respond to the significance of the North Downs Way, or to important views from and towards the North Downs.

There is a lack of a density gradient from west to east and no creative response to the sloping topography of the site. The house designs are a confused 'mishmash' of styles, neo-vernacular and mock agricultural, crudely intersected with some weak contemporary references.

The inadequate provision of affordable housing on this site should be judged as unacceptable, pointing again to the failure to propose and agree an acceptable and financially viable Masterplan across the whole of WYE3.

(Appeal C - ADAS)

For Appeal Site C at ADAS. Wye VDG are **extremely** concerned that this proposal would place excessive residential development far beyond the confines of the walkable village, an essential characteristic of Wye and an important objective of the NP.

As longstanding residents of Wye, we know that substantial housing development on this site will undermine the cohesion of Wye's concentric form and well-integrated strength of community. It would likely create an exclusive, probably gated and security fenced satellite of the village that residents would drive and **not** walk to from the village centre.

There are far too many houses and buildings proposed, including over scaled car-barns, we suggest at least 3 times too many buildings. So the opportunity to create a distinctive sense of place 'in the woods' has been missed.

(Conclusion)

So now for me to conclude:

The Appeal Site A proposals should have been refused on policy grounds. They are prejudicial to the other WYE3 sites and damaging to both architectural heritage and community value.

The design of Appeal Sites B & C should have been landscape led and reflect Wye's character areas, they fail to do this. They have also not been informed by a preceding LVA assessment, this being concluded after the architectural designs.

The VDG has the professional expertise necessary to make these assessments objectively. It is clear to us that TT have made numerous strategic and design mistakes in their handling of the whole WYE3 site, including the sites of these 3 Appeals.

In fact, through our own investigations, we know for certain that the WYE3 sites could be designed in a far more appropriate, creative, sensitive and policy compliant way. This **can** be done! We also know that it can be done in a financially viable way, that would cover land values, costs and developer profit. Moreover, that would deliver much needed affordable housing and mixed uses and also support the considerable capital costs of sensitively refurbishing the Grade I listed buildings to provide the **wonderful** community hub proposed by the WyeCrag group.

We believe that at this pivotal moment, TT the appellant, should be encouraged to return to the drawing board to start again, or else to sell their sites to another developer. A developer who has the expertise to rise to the challenge of firstly designing a high quality Masterplan. Then following from this, to carefully design and deliver individual site proposals that respect the history, character and vibrant community of Wye. That therefore **would** comply with planning policy, especially the vision and policies for the village described in our Neighbourhood Plan.

We therefore respectfully **urge** the Inspector to refuse each of these 3 Appeals.