**I present these comments mainly in relation to Appeal Site A in the belief that there exists at this Inquiry the opportunity to preserve for public use the unique heritage buildings at the heart of the former Wye College. This is a plea that you will enable continuing community access lost during the last decade or so, but so widely enjoyed for centuries before that.**

**This is within your power, sir, because of what I believe to be the recent planning failures of which Wye Parish Council’s representatives have spoken. Had Ashford Borough Council acted correctly throughout, the appellant would not now be in a position to make its current appeals. The relevant applications should have been judged procedurally unacceptable when submitted.**

**As to my own background**

**I attended Wye primary school, opened a business in the village in the 1970s and was a Parish Councillor for 23 years. My father lectured in Wye College during four decades and I grew up using its sports facilities. I have attended many functions in the heritage buildings at the heart of the College, indeed I have helped organise at least six events in the Old Hall and the Refectory. I was involved in preparation of Wye’s Neighbourhood Plan and I am active within WyeCRAG.**

**On the appellant’s failure to follow guidance in the Neighbourhood Plan**

**The Localism Act of 2011 encourages communities to prepare Neighbourhood Plans which would form part of local planning policy. Wye Parish Council spawned a group which produced the Wye Neighbourhood Plan. This became adopted policy and the village felt reassured that whatever happened to Wye College, it could only happen within the provisions of the Neighbourhood Plan. This required a masterplan covering the Wye 3 sites after consultation - and**

**by consensus between the appellant, the village and Ashford Borough Council.**

**Indeed, the appellant’s introductory letter to residents announced *“…..we committed to engaging with the village on the proposals we will be bringing forward. The proposals will be developed primarily through a masterplan, in the context of the Neighbourhood Plan….”***

**In considering a masterplan, Wye Parish Council was assured by Ashford Borough Council that the Neighbourhood Plan would be respected and Wye was encouraged to hold various community discussions. At the start of the process a group of village consultees was convened. I attended their first two meetings, but I was told that the members, representing various Wye organisations, had already been chosen by Ashford Borough Council and I was not required. Whilst I felt that it should be for Wye to choose its own representatives I did not pursue the matter. As matters progressed, Wye Parish Council, the village’s democratically elected representatives repeatedly found consultation - even communication with the appellants impossible as they simply would not engage.**

**Two exhibitions were held in College by Ashford Borough Council at which all the material had been prepared by the appellant, totally ignoring the Neighbourhood Plan. After the first such meeting, in May 2017, as an ordinary resident, I was so surprised by that, that I wrote to Richard Alderton (then Ashford’s Head of Planning) pointing out the abuse of process that was transpiring, but the second exhibition had the same defects. After attending that, I wrote to Ashford Borough Council’s Case Officer Mark Chaplin criticising their ineffectiveness and I quote the following extract -**

***“…….the evolution of the masterplan is meant to be a collaborative process and TT pledged in writing at the outset that this would be their approach. The village’s representatives WPC were only advised of the content of the exhibition the evening before. Since this happened in much the same way as the previous exhibition and TT were then much criticised, it becomes apparent that TT have no intention of the underlying issues being discussed on a collaborative basis. It seems increasingly apparent that TT are approaching the matter on an adversarial basis”.***

**That was in September 2017. Nothing changed and the appellants subsequently submitted their planning applications, to which Ashford Borough Council’s proper reaction surely should have been to tell them not to submit any planning applications for any of the WYE 3 sites until a masterplan was agreed, or simply reject them on those grounds.**

**Previous Public Access**

**I want to expand a little on what you have already heard from Mr Shoults. The Ashford area has a dearth of top quality function venues and you should understand the unique nature of the old College facilities. The availability of its ancient buildings during College vacations meant that organisations could be certain that their guests, whether or not they remembered the event itself, the food, the company or any particular speaker, would certainly remember the stunning venue. I’ve already referred to events I’ve helped organise in the Old Hall and Refectory for Ashford Rotary Club and Ashford Choral Socy, but many village organisations and commercial firms also used it for their meetings and for entertaining. For example, in the 1970s, Proprietary Perfumes, a Unilever subsidiary in Ashford, ran seminars in College where the closing lunch or dinner would always be held in**

**the parlour and visiting speakers were accommodated in rooms overlooking the cloister quadrangle. There is absolutely no substitute for access to these very special lost facilities and I cannot exaggerate their importance, not just to Wye but the whole locality.**

**In conclusion**

**Wye feels let down by the appellants over the following issues**

* **its failure to live up to its undertaking to consult with the village and agree a masterplan**
* **its ignoring the provisos of the NP**
* **its submission of piecemeal planning applications before any masterplan was agreed**
* **using its considerable experience to lead ABC into an abuse of process when they were under pressure**

**Wye College was once - and was for centuries - the beating heart of our community. You have it in your power, sir, to return the heritage buildings at its centre to community use and I sincerely hope that you will be able to support that line of action.**

**Finally, Sir, if you find in favour of the appellants, you will be sending a clear message that there is absolutely no point in a community wasting time preparing any Neighbourhood Plan, since it can be completely ignored. But more than that, you would be allowing the victory of powerful business interests over locally elected volunteers who know what is right for their community (because they have asked it) - but who can also be completely ignored. I believe that this would be wrong in relation to this unique suite of buildings - and surely this is exactly what the Localism Act of 2011 was enacted to prevent.**

**Alan Paterson 2nd February 2021**